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OR,
THE HIDDEN HAND.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DE-
TECTIVE," "HAWK HERON'S DEPUTY,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT'S DARK WORK.

A TALL, vigorous young man, warmly muffled against the cold, was walking rapidly through one of the most villainous streets that yet remain of the once notorious Five Points, New York.

It was a blustering March evening, with flurries of snow in the air, and the shadows of night swiftly coming on.

But one other figure was visible on the street—that of a young workwoman, as one might say by her decent but humble attire and business-like movement—who followed not far behind the young man, but with thoughtfully bowed head,

"AND HEAR ME, TOO, AVENGING HEAVEN!" SHE EXCLAIMED, RAISING HER SHAPELY HAND ALOFT.

and with such light footsteps over the snow as not to make him aware of her proximity.

Suddenly an intending assassin darted stealthily between the two from the neighboring house-shadows, apparently unconscious of his marked man being attended so closely.

His weapon, a long knife, flashed murderously aloft in the uncertain light.

Another instant of non-interposition would doubtless witness it plunged to the hilt between the broad shoulder-blades of the unconscious victim.

But the young woman had detected the murderous intent, swift and noiseless as had been its movement, as if by intuition.

With a warning cry, she sprang to the rescue with the agility of a leopardess.

The descending knife was struck aside by her hand, and, as the would-have-been victim wheeled in his tracks, taking in the terrible situation, which included both his peril and his escape, the miscreant recoiled a few steps, with the glare of a famine-smitten wolf baffled in its headlong spring.

"Failure!" he gnashed out between his grinding teeth. "But patience! You dare to befriend her" (he indicated the young woman with a savage gesture), "therefore you are doomed!"

Then, skillfully evading the young man's resentful rush, revolver in hand, the villain turned, disappearing down the crooked street with a velocity that would have mocked at pursuit.

Not a glimpse of the latter's face had been caught, save the two eyes that had sparkled like burning coals from under a heavy slouched hat—his figure was supple and powerful, though muffled for the most part in a long gray cloak—and now he was gone, vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

For a moment not a word was exchanged by the two others.

They moved side by side for a few steps in a sort of embarrassment, but presently confronted each other under a flickering street-lamp, where the young man for the first time put out of sight the revolver which he had retained in his hand, seemingly without knowing it.

"Waifa—Miss Target!"

"George—Mr. Evelyn!"

He was handsome and dark, thoughtful and serious beyond his years, of which he had numbered twenty-eight or nine; she beautiful, fair, and scarcely nineteen, but with a brooding cast of melancholy that made her look much older. George Evelyn was his father's business partner in a large paper-box manufactory in Pearl street; Waifa Target was forewoman in the establishment.

"This is all very extraordinary," said George. "I thought you had quitted work before I left the office. I had no idea you were so close behind me."

Waifa bent her head, murmuring something that he could not catch.

"You saved my life," he went on, gratefully. Another murmur, but still indistinct.

"Why should that unknown miscreant have attempted my life?" he continued.

Her answer was now audible enough, besides being remorseful, hopeless, and with indescribable melancholy.

"Did he not give you his reason? Because you have dared to befriend me!"

He looked at her curiously. Always a mystery to him, the girl's strangeness and beauty had long lingered tenderly in his secret thoughts, and yet there were no confidences between them, much as he would have desired it.

"A strange incentive to attempted crime, if the true one!" he muttered.

"Doubt not its truth, Mr. Evelyn; and do not forget that I warned you, no less than your kind-hearted father from the first."

"I am not forgetting it, Miss Target," said the young man, gently. "Of course, you had never seen my would-be assassin before—you did not recognize him?"

"I have not an idea who or what he was."

The answer was evasive, but so dreadfully spoken that he did not press the inquiry.

They had now begun to walk along together once more.

"Thank Heaven that your good old father is not yet returned from his journey!" continued the young woman, as if thinking aloud without intending it. "He also has dared to befriend me. The doom that you escaped might seek him out next."

"But my father is returned," said George.

"What! when? where is he now? Oh, sir, be quick!"

The words rushed from her lips with a wild eagerness. In spite of himself he was startled.

"What madness is this?" he exclaimed. "My father returned unexpectedly this evening. I was alone in the office putting away the books in the safe, when he came in."

"What! he is there now, alone, alone, in the vast, silent building?"

"Undoubtedly. After greeting me heartily, he said he would glance over the order book before going home. I left him toasting his toes on the fender, with the book across his knees."

Waifa had come to a fresh pause, and was clutching his arm with convulsive energy.

"Let us hurry back to him! Quick, there is

no time to lose!" she gasped. "That miscreant's threat was no idle one. Quick, I tell you! Your father's life may be trembling in the balance."

She began retracing her steps, dragging him, half-unwilling, after her. He strove to make light of her terror, of the alleged emergency, but her wildness overmastered him and presently infected his thoughts.

A moment later, and they were hurriedly retracing their course, making as directly for the manufactory, which occupied the three upper floors of a great six-story building on Pearl street, not far from the Brooklyn Bridge, as the network of narrow streets would allow.

The distance was not great, and their pace quickened into a run.

But fast as they covered the ground, the mysterious assassin had been before them.

They burst into the office only to find the old man dead—murdered—still in his easy-chair before the cheerful open fire, with the order book across his knees, but with his chin on his breast, his arms hanging limp and lifeless at his side—stone dead!

There was no blood, only a gaping, inly-bleeding wound, a deep, downward knife-thrust in the side of the neck.

Death had doubtless been as instantaneous as that which follows the lightning stroke.

The blow had evidently been delivered from behind, perhaps directly after the noiseless and unobstructed entrance of the assassin by the office door, which had not been secured, communicating with the staircase landing outside.

He had come as he had gone, like a phantom of ruthless cruelty, like the arch-destroyer himself, and apparently without leaving a trace of his identity.

The first discoverers of this ghastly deed were completely unnerved for the time being.

With a choking sob in his throat, George Evelyn staggered back, sinking into a chair, and covering his face with his quivering hands; while the young forewoman, her face wreathed with horrified commiseration, tottered to the dead man's side, and, falling on her knees, pressed one of the lifeless hands to her trembling lips.

This hand, though limp, was partly clinched, and something glistened in its grasp.

Mechanically, she took it out, and examined it.

It was a small gilt button, with a slight fragment of cloth adhering, as if torn, say from some sort of official waistcoat in the death-struggle, of which, however, there were no other signs of any having taken place.

A startled look came into the young woman's already bloodless face. Then, with a swift, somber glance at her convulsed companion's hidden face, she concealed the telltale object upon her person, and again bowed her head in voiceless grief.

What did it all mean?

Was this button the sole clew to the assassin's identification, and was this strange young woman desirous of effacing even that, in order to secure his safety?

We shall see.

The son of the murdered man was the first to break the horror-freighted silence.

Controlling his convulsive agitation by a tremendous effort, he looked up with a face yet haggard, but stern and resentful.

"My poor father murdered!" he exclaimed. "And think you, Waifa, by the same coward hand that would have dealt me my death-blow scarcely twenty minutes ago?"

There was a sort of affirmative moan from the kneeling girl.

"Heavens! it must be as you say, and for the bewildering, occult reason that you suggested," he went on. "My noble, my kind-hearted father! He had not a declared enemy in the world; and see! robbery could not have instigated the foul deed."

He motioned toward the open safe, which gave no evidences of having had its contents disturbed, and also to a pile of papers, with an open pocketbook full of bank-notes among them, on a writing-table near the corpse, which the old man had perhaps been examining shortly before receiving his death-stroke.

The young woman moaned again.

"Nay, it was as I hinted, as I warned!" she murmured through her colorless lips, while still mechanically caressing the pulseless hand. "He was kind to me, he would have befriended me. Hence he was doomed—murdered!"

The young man looked bewildered at these strange words, and he might have questioned their meaning more closely, but that the pure horror of his bereavement returned upon him with redoubled force.

"Hear me, Heaven!" he exclaimed, rising to an erect attitude, and lifting his hand solemnly aloft; "here over my poor father's murdered body, and by my sainted mother's churchyard grave, I swear that henceforth forever I shall not rest, sleep or eat contented until the mystery of my father's taking-off is made as light as day, and the doer of this deed writhes helplessly in my clutch or the hangman's! 'Tis a vow, registered in Heaven."

Waifa Target hearkened for an instant, with a dazed, dreamy look. Then she, too, rose

slowly to her feet. Her whole face and figure became suddenly transfigured, as with a new hope and an enthusiastic resolve, while her fine eyes burned with a gloomy fire.

"And hear me, too, avenging Heaven!" she exclaimed, likewise raising her shapely hand aloft; "neither shall I rest, sleep, or eat content henceforth forever while a stone is left unturned by me to aid the accomplishment of this be-reaved young man's sworn resolve—ay, though I turn detective once again, and suffer more than I have heretofore suffered, in bringing the dark to the light, the lost to be found, and the fell destroyer of his peace and mine to justice. I have sworn it!"

George Evelyn heard and marked her with uncontrolled wonder.

"What do I hear?" he exclaimed. "You, Waifa, a detective once, and now ready to aid me in this great work?"

She made a swift gesture.

"Yes, yes; my past shall be explained to you in good season. Quick, raise the alarm, call the police! Spellbound by this horrid spectacle, we have already delayed too long."

"You are right." And he sprang toward one of the windows overlooking the street, when again her voice, this time in caution, reached him.

"The police are numbskulls," said she. "Give them the case as it stands, but none of the interior readings that are for our perusal."

He signified his acquiescence and threw up the window.

The alarm was given, and in a few minutes the police were in possession of the office, and of such superficial facts and suggestions as the case presented on its face.

Presently a detective called out from the interior of the safe, which he had been examining:

"Was anything in this little drawer? Of all the compartments here, it seems the only one that has been tampered with."

His companions, together with George Evelyn, crowded up to the safe door, the young forewoman indifferently lingering in the vicinity of the dead body.

All the gas-jets had been turned on, and the office was now brilliantly illuminated.

"Ha! say you so?" exclaimed George. "Which is the drawer broken open? I see. Why, that is the drawer—" an agitated pause. "Miss Target, come here! The precious package you intrusted to our safe-keeping. I—I am afraid it is gone."

Livid, with a new and terrible apprehension in her face, but without a word, she had sprung to his side, her eyes dilating as they devoured the empty drawer.

"Oho!" said the detective, eying her keenly (police detectives are not all such numbskulls, after all). "Nothing else stolen, not a stiver, and all this money to be had for the snatching. Was the package you speak of the only thing in this drawer?"

Young Evelyn nodded.

"My poor father," said he, "placed it just there a year ago, at Miss Target's earnest request, and even presented her with the key to the little compartment. It must have remained undisturbed up to the moment of this—this ghastly deed."

So a tangible motive, though a mysterious one still, had at last been found for the crime.

Miss Target tried to speak, but no sound issued from her moving lips.

With all eyes riveted upon her, she drew from her bosom the key, which was suspended from a delicate gold chain round her neck, and held it up.

"So," said the detective. "Well, it's gone—stolen—that alone, of all that was so well worth a murderous robber's object. This is strange."

No answer.

"Was the package a valuable one, miss?"

Here she found her voice.

"It was beyond price to me!" she wailed. "It contained the proofs—my treasure—all I possessed in the world!" And then she slipped to the floor in a confused heap.

She had fainted.

CHAPTER II.

WAIFA AS A DETECTIVE.

A FORTNIGHT after the murder.

Two eventful weeks, covering the natural amount of public excitement, newspaper speculation, a coroner's investigation that elucidated nothing, a formal and standing reward of ten thousand dollars offered for the murderer's apprehension by George Evelyn, sole heir to the slain man's considerable estate, the usual number of "theories" advanced, supported, derided or abandoned, and kind-hearted, ruthlessly murdered Eliphalet Evelyn, the old paper-box manufacturer, was under the sod in Greenwood, with the profound mystery of his violent death apparently as dense and unrelieved as at the moment of its inception.

It was the afternoon of just such another inclement March day as the eventful one with which our story opened.

George Evelyn was brooding reflectively before his office fire, William Clape, his book-keeper, being his sole companion.

But a door leading into the adjoining work-

room was partly open, and many were the kindly and sympathetic glances cast at the drooping figure of the young proprietor by such of the operatives, mostly women and girls, who from time to time flitted past the opening in the pursuit of their duties.

Easy to perceive that this was a business establishment in which the happiest relations existed between employer and employed.

Even the sallow bookkeeper, who was the reverse of prepossessing, scratched away at his high desk as if mixing some love with his industry. There was a sense of content and fellowship in the air, even the regular, humdrum throb of machinery in the upper floors seeming to come down from above with a sort of pleasant refrain, such as:

No hard feelings in Evelyn's lot,
Never a strike or a boycott
Where labor and love combine.
Profit-sharing, and all things fair,
Nor master nor man can the other spare,
And every one toes the line.
The line, the line, the line!
And every one toes the line
Where labor and love combine.

And such was exactly the good-will and harmony prevailing in the Evelyn establishment; a judicious and equitable system of *pro rata* profit-sharing, formulated and put in operation by the elder proprietor a twelve-month before his death; besides being improved and perfected to the yet greater advantage of the operatives by the younger, in the brief interval since that tragical event.

No wonder that his work-people loved and sympathized with George Evelyn in his bereavement.

Happiness reigned in their homes, charity in their hearts. The drones and incapables were pushed to the wall until thrust or pensioned into obscurity. The best industry was the best paid, superior skill achieved emolument, no less than recognition, until every man, boy, woman or girl employed became an appropriate part of a money-producing machine that, governed by justice, stimulated by enlightened self-interest, and oiled by interstitial good-will, ran on serenely from morning to night with the harmony of clockwork.

In fact, so perfect had the system become, the business might almost be said to run itself.

But George Evelyn's thoughts were elsewhere just now than upon his fortunate lot in the business world.

It was seldom that the mystery surrounding his father's death was not present in his mind, as now, and the thoughtful lines had already deepened unmistakably on his cheeks and brow.

Presently he raised his head, and, after studying the bookkeeper's side-face intently for a moment, spoke:

"Mr. Clape," said he, "are you nearly ready to make those collections on your way home that are in order?"

"Yes, sir; will be ready in a moment, sir." And, putting the finishing stroke to the bottom of a last column of figures he had been summing up, Mr. Clape glanced at the clock, and began putting the great books into the safe.

I have said that he was sallow, but he was rather cadaverous than that. A tall, thin man, of thirty-five or forty, inclined to be dressy, with an impenetrable face and uncertain eyes. He had been in his place for over a year, was reputedly scrupulously exact in his accounts, and, though of unknown private life, had always given satisfaction.

"Before you go, Mr. Clape," continued Mr. Evelyn, "pray ask the forewoman, Miss Target, to step this way, if not particularly engaged."

"Yes, sir."

And with an odd glint in his eye, Mr. Clape, who was putting on his hat, overcoat and gloves, stepped briskly into the work-room.

Evelyn's eyes resumed their meditative scrutiny, this time of the man's back, until he had disappeared, and then returned to their study of the fire.

A moment later he was alone with the forewoman.

It was evident that more confidential relations had been established between them than when we last saw them together.

Miss Target had carefully closed the door by which she had followed Mr. Clape into the office, and then, at a significant glance from Evelyn, as the clerk disappeared by the main door, closing it behind him, she quietly turned the key in its lock.

Evelyn nodded his approval. The clock was just striking three.

"Three hours before stopping work," said he.

"Will you have time enough?"

"More than enough, I think."

He nodded again, and she passed behind him, traversing the length of the office, which was long and narrow, to the door of a small room, once a lumber room, but of which she had latterly had the exclusive use, where, producing a key, she fitted it in the lock.

She was taller than the average, singularly graceful, and with a carriage that was the melody of movement. Her walk, indeed, might have challenged the criticism of a roomful of

Spanish ladies, who are so justly celebrated for their unconscious and floating grace of locomotion.

Evelyn's eyes followed her every motion lingeringly until she had disappeared into the little room, when a half-doubting, half-expectant look came into them.

This look gave way to one of pleased astonishment upon her reappearance, in a surprisingly short space of time, considering the change that had been effected.

In fact, none but he would have suspected her identity.

She had entered the cabinet a woman, she emerged from it a man—a youthful exquisite, but slightly below the medium height, and got up regardless of expense, from the daintily-rubbed patent-leather toothpick foot incasements, to the correctly-tilted stovepipe hat, dazzling in its newness.

A smileless, somewhat melancholy blonde youth, perhaps, but without a suspicion of the sham in mien, air or carriage.

A veteran lightning-change actress could not have carried out the transformation with more naturalness and aplomb.

Evelyn considered the new-comer with interested gravity.

"I shouldn't have known you," said he, simply. "Your claim to have already played the detective successfully is more than justified."

The youth had drawn on his gloves, arranged his white silk throat-muffler, buttoned up his overcoat, and now, cane under arm, and with his hand on the outer door, looked back at him with simple thanks for his criticism.

"With all that you have done to facilitate my disguises," was the reply—"the changes at my choice, both here and in my own rooms—it is surely my own fault if we do not succeed. You will await me here?"

He nodded, adding quickly aloud, as if in obedience to an afterthought: "Do not forget that to-night you are to give me the history of your past life."

A spasm of torture crossed the handsome, delicately-mustached countenance, but it was gone in an instant.

"You have done well to remind me of it; but I shall keep my promise—if living then."

Evelyn was once more alone.

Three hours of anxious waiting, however, are always weary ones.

He arose, and passed through the different work-rooms, being welcomed everywhere more as friend than master.

In the pasting-room, an odd little elf of a girl, with an old-young face that might have puzzled the world for almost any time between twelve and fifteen years, looked up from among her older companions, at a long work-table, where they were all industriously engaged, and greeted his approach with a comical smirk.

"What is it, Liz?" said he, laying his hand gently on her head. "And how are you getting along?"

"Fine as a fiddle, sir. Miss Target says I'll be a reg'lar good 'un, if I only keeps on. An' look, sir!" She indicated by a side-swipe of her chin (her hands being busy) the rolled-up sleeves of her calico gown, which seemed new. "This is the dress she made for me. But you men never notice nothin'."

Her companions tried to hide their laughter, and the assistant forewoman looked her shocked disapproval, but Evelyn smiled amusedly.

"The dress becomes you mightily, Liz," said he. "Continue doing your best, and you'll be all right."

"Oh, never fear for me, sir!" said the child complacently, as he turned to go, dropping words of kindness and encouragement here and there. "This racket lays over sellin' newspapers an' gutter-snipin' six to one, an' I cut my second teeth long ago."

Evelyn sauntered back to the office, where an occasional business visitor occupied his attention, and he strove to kill the intervals with newspaper reading, but the time passed slowly enough.

It was a quarter to six before the door opened to admit the returned transformed, and he looked up with a quick, questioning glance.

Fortunately, there was no one else in the office.

"Well?" said he.

"Our suspicions were well-founded," said the pseudo-dandy. "Clape is, at all events, a complete hypocrite. But"—with a hurried glance at the clock—"I shall have to defer my report till later."

She hurried into the cabinet, speedily reappeared in her own personality, and then hastened into the work-room, to be in her place at the knocking-off, for Miss Target was responsible for many duties.

After her custom, she was the last to quit the work-rooms, but she waited until the entire building seemed deserted before entering the office again, where Evelyn was impatiently awaiting her.

Miss Target took a seat opposite Evelyn's before the fire, and at once set about making her report, in a low, business-like tone, and as dispassionately as if but solely concerned as to its succinctness and accuracy.

"As you know, sir," said she, "from certain unguarded words that Mr. Clape has let fall to me since the tragedy, we, that is, you and I, came to the conclusion that he might have secretly read the documents committed to your father's safe-keeping by me, and whose abstraction was perhaps the incentive to the crime, and in that way have had some connection with, or intimation of, the perpetrator's plans."

Evelyn nodded.

"Little, I believe, has heretofore been known of Mr. Clape's life when away from his employment?"

"Almost nothing. Of course, I have his Harlem address, in accordance with my business custom. It is in East 127th street, near the river, where he is said to have bachelor's lodgings. Beyond this, and that he is a member of one of the city regiments, while occasionally professing studious home-habits and profound religious convictions, I know nothing of his present life, nor of his antecedents."

"The man is then a hypocrite, deep, foul and deadly. If honorable in his business employment, as you have granted for him, then is his life anomalously two-fold, the hidden side of it being saturated with vicious self-indulgence in every hideous form."

"You astonish me. And you have substantiated all this in those three hours of detective work?"

"In less than three. Listen. I had no difficulty in overtaking him, and therefore was as his shadow, his invisible *alter ego*, without exciting his suspicion. After performing his few business commissions with his down-town staidness and solemnity, he boarded an Elevated train as though eager for the more congenial breath of his up-town profligacy and dissoluteness—as if springing out of his false self into his real self. I am not exaggerating, Mr. Evelyn. With every station passed on his up-town route, his mantle of sanctimonious self-masking fell away from him little by little; he had an added leer for every well-appearing girl or woman in range; and when he stepped out at his destination it was with no further pretense of being other than the unprincipled man-about-town that he is. He took a drink of brandy at the first saloon convenient, and banded jokes with the bartenders and loungers that would have put Zola to the blush. Thence I followed him into a low drinking and billiard saloon in the vicinity of his home. With its debased frequenters he was a welcome and congenial spirit. I am not a novice at billiards. We were soon playing for small stakes. I lost two games to him so narrowly as to highly flatter his self-esteem. He had continued to drink brandy, and, by a careless display of the money you had provided me with, together with an assumption of recklessness that he seemed to find fascinating, I won his confidence sooner than I had hoped. A good-natured dispute as to the membership of the militia regiment to which he belongs ended, as I wished, in his asking me to his room that he might prove that he was in the right. I accompanied him with more willingness than he could guess. He lodges in a dingy dwelling house with his sister, who is a professional seeress, star-reader, etc., and a dangerous woman. In Clape's room, I obtained my chief object. After proving his correctness in our dispute, he exhibited his regimentals (his lieutenant's uniform) with considerable pride. I examined them closely. This gilt button and fragment of blue cloth were never torn from any piece of Mr. Clape's wardrobe—perhaps never had any connection with him—that much is certain. My report is ended."

As she finished speaking, Miss Target for the first time since the murder displayed the button and shred that she had secretly taken from the victim's death-clutch.

George Evelyn was astonished.

He had listened to her report with admiration, while wondering at the detective skill manifested by one of her years, but was wholly unprepared for this revelation.

"What is that?" he exclaimed, examining the button. "Where is it from? Where did you get it?"

She told him.

"Why have you kept your possession of it a secret?"

"The police would only have built more idiotic theories out of it."

"But I—was I not worthy of your confidence?"

She blushed, and was disturbed.

"Yes; forgive me that I yielded to a desire to take you by surprise in following up the clew. But, after all, you cannot understand until you know—all"

"Ah, and to-night, as you promised." His face had cleared. "And this button—you hoped to prove Clape's complicity by this?"

"Nay; I thought it merely possible."

"But the button is flat, small, perfectly plain. If belonging to a militiaman's regimentals, it would bear the N. G.—National Guard—initials."

"In the case of an officer's waistcoat of the fatigue uniform, too?"

"I think so."

"I have then been in error. I took it in con-

nection with Clape's implied knowledge of the contents of that stolen package. Then when I remembered that such a waistcoat had been worn by my pursuing demon—the haunter of my life—

She paused, biting her lip.
"Ha! what is this? Your demon—your haunter!"

Before she could reply a diabolical laugh, terrible and mysterious, rung in their ears.

Terrible because issuing from nowhere, or rather bursting out of the illuminated air (the gas had been lighted) directly over their heads. A laugh without lips, a mockery from the invisible!

Waifa sunk back, the pallor of the dead upon her face, her hand clutching at her heart.

"'Tis he!" she murmured; "I am lost!"
Then a voice, more awesome still, followed the air-born laugh.

"Fools! children!" it cried, in clarion tones; "would ye track Fate, Destiny, the Inevitable, home to her secret lair, and by a gilded trifle? Ha, ha, ha! As the doomed are doomed, so is the destroying hand untraceable!"

CHAPTER III.

EVELYN'S LOVE.

BUT the spell was broken, for this mysterious warning, though bursting, like the laugh, from nowhere, from out of the very bosom of the air, was accompanied by a sound, as of an unguarded movement of feet upon the staircase just outside the office door.

Localized, it thus lost something of its supernaturalness, and lent itself a habitation and a name.

Evelyn bounded from his chair, and tore open the door, revolver in hand. Rapidly retreating steps were pattering off far down in the almost total obscurity.

In an instant he was darting in pursuit, closely followed by Waifa, her concern for his safety conquering all other feeling.

They were nearing the top of the last flight, the half-open street door showing as a glimmering space at the bottom.

"Mr. Evelyn—George!" she cried out, in her excitement; "give up the chase. You carry your life in your hand—stop for my sake!"

The words thrilled him like an ecstasy, but he made no pause.

At that instant the space below was darkened by the fugitive, who swiftly turned, and there was a shot from him as he disappeared.

Evelyn felt the wind of the bullet against his ear, and there was a sharp exclamation from Waifa, whom he heard stumble and clutch at the baluster behind him.

All thought of pursuit, rage, resentment vanished in that agonized instant.

Good heavens! are you struck? Waifa, my love, my darling! speak to me."

And then she was in his arms, a helpless weight, and he was carrying her back to the light, up the stairs in the darkness, the overmastering love of his life—heretofore unbreathed, perhaps unguessed—finding expression in endearing words, frantic syllables, even in trembling kisses rained upon her cold face.

He made no doubt that she was wounded—it might be to the death.

A warm drop fell upon his hand. Horrible thought!—might it be from her welling life-blood?

But no; as he bore her back into the lighted office, she recovered, and struggled out of his embrace.

She was weeping silently. It was only a tear that had bedewed his hand. She was not even bleeding, and yet the waist of her dress was rent at the side, showing the track of the bullet.

A steel spring in the bodice beneath had warped off the glance-shot, but not without causing a momentarily paralyzing shock.

No other explanation was necessary, as, with her hand clasped over the slight rent, she stood with bowed head before him, her lovely face now crimsoning painfully.

The secret passion of each for the other had been betrayed in that mad instant, when both were face to face with death; but the thought, if one of embarrassment for her, was of exultation for him.

He closed the door with his heel, and flung himself at her feet.

"Waifa, I love you! Though now for the first time overmastered, I feel that I have loved you from the first. You are not indifferent—you betrayed yourself in that unguarded expression—those endearing words, 'For my sake!'—in the darkness. Oh, the ecstasy with which I heard them! Waifa, I love you—I who have never loved before! Give me the right to protect you—to stand forevermore between you and the world—between you and the mysterious menace of your life! Be my wife!"

The declared love of an honorable and noble heart is self-eloquent; it makes its own oratory, even if crowded with hyperbole—with what the carping cynic would call "gush;" it has a passion and a glory that are the reflex of Nature in her emotional moods—in the cataract's leap, the volcano's glare, the burst of ocean surf upon a desert beach.

The words had rushed from his lips like a torrent, and yet less like the torrent's unreasoning rush than like the river's powerful flow.

A wild joy, a supreme content, had leaped into the young woman's face and eyes, but only to instantly give way to a look of terror and dismay.

"This is madness!" she faltered. "Sir—Mr. Evelyn, you must forget all this!"

"Forget that I love you? Impossible!"

"You have your father's death to avenge. Think of that alone."

"I do think of it. We will avenge it together. Could I have an abler coadjutor than in you?"

"With declared love between us, we would be powerless."

"I cannot think so. You admit, then, that my love is returned."

"I admit nothing."

"Yet you have half-confessed it. Will you not fill me with transport by giving me the assurance?"

"No—never!"

"Waifa, I love you!"

"This is madness. If you continue it, we must separate—our association in this blood quest is at an end!"

Her tone had grown peremptory, almost harsh.

Saddened by her repulse, he arose with a humiliated look.

"Is it, then, my crime that I love you, Waifa?"

"Yes—or at least that you should think or speak of it until the crime is no longer a mystery."

His face brightened.

"Ah, but after that—for with such a stimulus the elucidation cannot be far distant—then I may speak, and even hope?"

"Not until you know—all."

"You mean with regard to yourself, to your own mystery?"

She had turned away her face, and her voice came faintly now.

"Yes."

"But I am to learn that this very night. I have your promise."

"True, true!" and she wrung her hands silently.

"If you regret your promised confidence, retain it in your keeping!" he cried, eagerly.

"Waifa, let the dead past bury its dead, if you wish it. I only desire your love. Gladly would I accept of that alone, without a shred of your life's mystery, if it so pains you to unvail it."

His trustfulness touched her.

"Would you so?" she murmured. "You are brave. But you know not what you ask—what you would dare."

"I know that I love you."

Her manner once more became firm, and even cold.

"Mr. Evelyn, forget what has passed between us this evening; do not return to the subject, or henceforth our lives and actions must proceed apart."

She was already attired for the street. With a swift, flitting movement, she slipped past him, opened the door, and was gone.

Humbled and repulsed, he forgot for the instant the late-escaped perils of the staircase.

When they recurred to him he rushed after her, to warn, perhaps to insist, on being her escort; but the last echoes of her light footfalls had died away in the depths before he could reach the first landing.

"Perhaps she is right," said Evelyn, with a sigh. "Crime-tracking and love could scarcely have gone well hand in hand."

And he deliberately set about closing the office, and going to his home, which had never seemed so incomplete, so lonesome and so desolate as now.

As for Waifa, her fortitude had hardly enabled her to reach the open air with her accustomed swift and energetic step; and thence all the way homeward her spirit was in a tumult, her heart fluttering like a bird uncaged.

"He loves me! he loves me!" that is what it seemed to say. "Oh, joy! I am no longer alone, for I am beloved. Oh, misery! my danger is no longer wholly mine, for he may share it, in spite of me!"

The young forewoman's wages were adequate, and the little home that she had provided for herself was a comfortable, but somewhat unique, one.

It consisted of four snugly-furnished little attic rooms in a private house in East Fifty-eighth street, whose resident family she could thoroughly trust, and where the tenant kept house after a thrifty fashion of her own.

While Waifa was mounting the last staircase leading to this airy little habitation of hers, the door of a small room answering as her kitchen was suddenly thrown open, giving egress to a flood of light, a volume of savory smelling smoke from a cooking stove, and to an odd little elfish figure framed in the doorway, with a toasting-fork in one hand, and a saucepan in the other.

"Aha!" cried the child; "so it's you at last, mommer, is it? I'd about given you up—thought you might have cut your stick an' eloped with a millionaire, in fact."

"Yes, Liz, it is I at last," said Waifa, enter-

ing with a smile, and putting away her things after a critical glance at the cooking. "I have been detained."

"I should smile. But since you're right side up with care, mommer, what's the odds? It's warm and hunky in here, you bet!"

"Yes; and I am hungry, too. Have you something nice for our supper?"

"Delmonico couldn't teach it with a gold fork, my dear!" And Liz, with lively enthusiasm, began to put the supper on the table in a much larger adjoining room. "Look at that! Sas-sage an' buttered toast fit for a Vanderbilt, with cold pork an' beans t'at Jay Gould would give a year of puts an' calls to tackle jest once. If such grub don't stick to our ribs, mommer, it's the fault of our innards, an' not of the grub."

Waifa burst into a laugh as fresh and silvery as a schoolgirl's. Ever since she had made a home, no less than employment, for Newspaper Liz, this queer little street waif, she had tried in vain to correct the hoydenish way, that yet contributed not a little to the alleviation of her own melancholy.

"Liz," said she, when the meal was over and Liz was clearing away the things with the sort of hop-skip-and-jump energy that characterized her every movement, "I am expecting a visitor this evening—a gentleman. Your presence will not be desirable while he remains."

"A gentleman!" almost yelled the *protegee*, with eyes like saucers. "Hooray!"

Waifa colored angrily.

"Stop your nonsense," said she, "and do not forget my bidding."

Liz went on with her work, only murmuring a subdued "Golly!" and when Mr. Evelyn was shown up-stairs by the landlady a little later, she obediently disappeared.

"What!" said the visitor curiously; "do you have Liz living with you?"

Waifa merely nodded, for she was studying him closely. His manner, though controlled, indicated some disturbance.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Something has happened."

He caught her glance and forced a smile.

"You are a keen observer, Miss Target. Yes; as I was entering this house a stranger jostled me rudely. Somehow the incident suggested the proximity of my father's assassin. I ran after the fellow, but he disappeared as if by magic."

Waifa was greatly agitated.

"You have something pinned to your arm," said she, pointing. "Is it a scrap of writing?"

It was just that. Astonished he tore off the fragment of paper, and read from it aloud these words:

"George Evelyn, be warned in season. The girl Waifa is like a upas growth, nursing and imparting danger. Sunder from her now and forever, or your father's doom shall be yours!"

Waifa clasped her hands.

"Oh, it is true, it is true!" she moaned, in a desolate voice. "Fly from me, or you are lost! I am sure of it. There is horror, fear, ruin in my very aspect!"

CHAPTER IV.

WAIFA'S TERRIBLE PAST HISTORY.

"NONSENSE!" exclaimed Evelyn, crumpling up the warning with a laugh. "My dear young lady, you permit yourself to be disturbed by trifles. That for it!" And he tossed the paper into the fire.

But Waifa recovered it, smoothed it out on a table, and then, seating herself as though oblivious of his presence, fell to studying it eagerly, with her hands pressed to her temples.

Evelyn still remained standing, with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand. He watched her with good-natured irony.

"What do you make of it!" said he at last.

"Surely not that the handwriting is poor Clape's?"

Her reply was rather to some query of her own than to his.

"The same as the others!" she murmured drearily. "The same as all the rest! Ah, when and how will it end?"

"What! you have received similar warnings, and in the same handwriting?"

She looked up with a start.

"Oh, sir, forgive my impoliteness!" She hastened to relieve him of his hat and overcoat, while offering him a seat. "I am not often so forgetful."

He laughed pleasantly. There was not the faintest suggestion in his manner of the tender episode of an hour or two previous, for which she was secretly grateful, so that the platonic *camaraderie* that had theretofore subsisted between them could be resumed as though never interrupted.

Conveniently forgetting his unanswered question, the young man looked about him with pleased curiosity.

Everything was the pattern of neatness, airily permeated with the stamp of true femininity, with here and there a flower-pot or inexpensively tasteful ornament, in which he recognized with delight a refined and artistic sentiment.

"You are charmingly situated here, Miss Target," said he, bravely, but at no little cost,

forcing himself amid the conventionalities of manner and speech. "I owe you thanks for having admitted me into such a delightful snug-gery."

She bent her thoughtful face in acknowledgment, her sitting attitude being an unconsciously graceful one between the yellowish lamplight on the one side and the ruddy fire-glow on the other, but her melancholy lips were not parted in response to his compliment.

"Mr. Evelyn, I thank you," was all she said. "For what?" in surprise.

"For your consideration, sir; for showing me that the original harmonious but strictly business relations between us are re-established."

"Ah!" and he pulled his mustache. "Such was your desire."

"And is. And I thank you, for it assists me in my determination to go on with you hand-in-hand in this terrible detective-quest that would not have otherwise been possible. I not only fulfill a promise in telling it, but it becomes necessary that you should know the story of my life."

Evelyn at once became deeply attentive.

"On a cold night in March, nineteen years ago, a child of six or eight months was left on the doorstep of a poor, hard-working young couple in Boston. Their name was Wormser, the man was a shoemaker, and, fortunately for the little waif, they were passionately fond of children, and without any of their own. Nevertheless, but for an accident calling the woman to the street door, the child might have died of exposure. As it was, she took it in, and they adopted it as their own. There was scarcely a hint of the babe's paternity or extraction. But the clothes and wrappings incasing it were of the costliest description, and bore the initials L. F., delicately worked in silk. There were, moreover, a wallet containing one thousand dollars in crisp, new Treasury notes, and two letters, or documents, written in the same hand, a feminine one, both unsigned, and both addressed to Mr. Wormser, with regard to the child and the money, besides a couple of trinkets—a child's coral necklace and a valuable diamond ring—perhaps an engagement ring—respectively inscribed with the initials L. F. and T. F. One of the letters merely made a gift of the money to Wormser on condition that the child be adopted as his own, together with a request that it be christened Waifa. I was that child."

Evelyn was listening quite breathlessly now.

"I was that child. The other document, without mentioning a single name, contained in detail what purported to be a history of the child's birth, extraction and circumstances; the one alleged to be honorable, that is to say, legitimate, the other of the proudest and the best, the other of great wealth, to which it would by rights one day be heir. But it was the fruit of a secret marriage; death by foul means would inevitably be its portion if its existence were to become known to a certain powerful and interested party; hence its mother resigned herself to parting with it forever, solely that its budding life might be preserved. That was all. Perhaps the contents of that letter were mere fabrications to conceal a heartless mother's heartbreak in her shame, and the child-waif was no more than a poor foundling. Like enough, for was not I that child?"

She repeated this in an indescribably weary tone, and then went on:

"I thrived famously at first with my dear foster-parents, for they were of the kindest and the best. And it also seemed for a time that my coming to them out of the unknown was a happy turning-point in their lives. They had been starving poor and were now comparatively rich; they had been unfortunate, and now became prosperous. A small business, purchased with the money that came with me, was successful. All went well with them until they found that something else had accompanied the child—trust to their faithful hands—mystery, danger, fatality!"

She interrupted herself with a long breath, and then proceeded much more hurriedly.

"I was four years old, when one evening my foster-mother was on her doorstep, with me in her arms, watching for her husband's return from his business. There came a shot from the opposite side of the street, and, as my foster-mother gave an exclamation of pain, a tall man, evidently the firer of the shot, disappeared in the twilight with a baffled cry. The bullet had passed close to my head, and grazed the woman's cheek before burying itself in the door-post."

"When my father came home, my mother (I shall speak of them as my own parents when convenient) was indignant. She insisted that there had been a deliberate attempt to assassinate her, and demanded that the police should be informed of it. But my father, who was a meditative man, said, with a troubled air: 'See that you hold your peace about this, wife, or worse evil may come of it. It was the child's life that was sought, not yours.'

"The succeeding events justified his penetration. A year later, when I was playing in front of the house with some other children, a tall man on horseback, with his face concealed from view, reined up suddenly at the curb, and rais-

ing a huge stone which he carried in his right hand, hurled it at my head with terrific force. Providentially or otherwise I escaped the missile, which, nevertheless, crushed the skull of a little boy at my side. As my mother, who had witnessed it all, rushed upon the scene, the horseman, evidently the same one who had made the previous attempt on my life, galloped away with another exclamation of baffled rage. Such a secret could no longer be kept. The little boy had been killed outright, and his parents were frantic. The affair was given to the police authorities, who were also informed of the previous attempt, but the mystery remained unsolved. Matters now began to grow unpleasant for my foster-parents. I became marked as the little girl with a mysterious death ever dangling over her head; my mother was fearful to have me out of doors, even in her company; my father, who loved me devotedly, grew moody and dissatisfied. Once I overheard him saying to my mother: 'Pray God that there is some mistake—that there is no systematic deadliness in this thing! Otherwise we must betake ourselves to distant parts with our treasure, for the child has become too dear for us to neglect any precautions.'

"This determination was destined to be hastened. A few months later, on the night of the Fourth of July, we were together at table in the dining-room, when a rocket-bomb, hurled from one of the yards in the rear, fell in our midst, and burst with disastrous effect. My foster-mother and the servant girl, who was just entering from the kitchen, were maimed for life, and my foster-father's hand was bleeding, the tea-cup, which he had been in the act of raising to his lips, being broken to fragments. I alone, though the innocent and fateful cause of it all, escaped unharmed. It would not do to ascribe the catastrophe to accident, connected with the fireworks of the celebration; the deadly nature of the projectile, no less than our past experience, precluded such a supposition.

"In less than a month, the Wormsers had secretly disposed of their profitable business, and, under the cover of many precautions, removed with me to Cincinnati. Must they not have loved me dearly, to have clung to me through it all—not to have put me, as a marked, incendiary and fated thing, away from their breasts forever? Ah, they were noble, they were true! I was attracting danger and death to every one in my proximity like a baleful lodestar of dismay, but I doubt not that they loved me better, and clung to me the closer for all that."

"For several years, we were uninterruptedly happy in our new home, though my good guardian's business was no longer successful, and we gradually sunk back into the original poverty and hard luck. But nothing was spared upon my education, and I thrived apace. Dread for my life was their sole terror; overmastering fondness was interwoven inextricably amid their fear; idolization was their breastwork to the mysterious attacks of Fate itself."

"But the unseen Pursuit, though temporarily baffled, was remorselessly persistent and alive."

"When I was twelve years old, we had become greatly reduced in our worldly affairs, while yet rejoicing in what seemed the Canaan of our fear-fraught wanderings—our new-found security from oppression and pursuit. We occupied a poor cottage on Vine Street Hill—up over the Rhine, as the locality is called by the Cincinnatians, the German element composing our entire environments—a part of which was Wormser's humble cobbler's shop. One morning he found in front of his door an admirable lapstone, apparently lost from some shoemaker's outfit. He had long wished for a new lapstone, though unwilling to buy one, he was so poor. Now, joyfully calling our attention to his find, he lost no time in making it of avail, while telling us to advertise the incident everywhere, that the real owner might know where to recover his property."

"At the first heavy blow of the hammer upon the lapstone there was an awful explosion. The stone had been cunningly charged in the center with nitro-glycerine, the shop was a wreck, and my unfortunate guardian was writhing amid the debris with his left leg hopelessly mangled, necessitating amputation above the knee. My mother and I, not being in the shop, escaped injury, though the entire cottage was more or less shattered. The same day there came an unsigned letter to Wormser by mail, solemnly warning him to cast me out of his protection forever, or accept death as the consequence of his refusal. It was the precursor of many similar ones received thereafter, mostly by me. Mr. Evelyn, they were all in one handwriting—that of the paper that was fastened to your coat-sleeve this evening."

Evelyn drew a long breath. But for his confidence in the lovely narrator's veracity, he would have believed himself to have been listening to some farrago of horrors, as interesting but as incredible as the description of a nightmare dream. He could only bow his head, and Miss Target resumed the thread of her tale with yet more hurriedness and impatience.

"While perhaps necessary," she went on, "these sickening details are maddening to me,

and I will strive to be more succinct. This last affair made a noise in the newspapers, and something of the former attempts on my life leaked out. I became an object of curiosity and sympathy. Good came of it, too, for it brought us money, contributions from the benevolent, in our distress. When my foster-father came out of the hospital with his wooden leg, it was to find himself in possession of a larger sum—nearly two thousand dollars, I believe—than he had been familiar with for years, together with generous offers of lucrative employment from every side."

"But the mysterious foe, if still baffled in his main object, had at last struck mortally into the bosom of our home. Wormser had grown taciturn, moody and hopeless; his wife the victim of haunting, ever-present fears for our common safety, until afraid of her very shadow. It needed but one more shock from the invisible demonism to precipitate yet more melancholy results. A neighbor's child offered me a particular kind of confection of which I was extravagantly fond, but of which I declined to partake by reason of an aching tooth. The girl then, at my laughing request, ate the confection herself, after sharing it with my foster-mother, who was likewise partial to sweets. In an hour or less they were writhing on beds of agony. The confection had been poisoned. The girl confessed that it had been intrusted to her by a stranger, with the express injunction that it should be given to me, and he had also given her a small sum of money for herself. From her description, we doubted not that the poisoner was identical with our relentless foe. The young girl recovered her health, but my foster-mother—Ah, the recollection is too harrowing! With her nervous system already at a low ebb, she could offer less resistance to the insidious drug. She died!"

"On the night after her burial, my foster-father and I were pursuing our way far westward, almost in disguise, with our identity concealed, on an emigrant train. My foster-father had grown prematurely old with suffering, sorrow and mental distress. But as we left the second fatal city behind us, his spirits seemed to rise. 'Aha, we'll give the hungering monster the slip this time, my dear!' he chuckled. 'Even though he were Argus-eyed, he shall track you no more, my sweet child, with his destroying breath. We must even change our name to mislead him. What shall our new name be, my little Waifa? At first I was mute. Then in a sudden gust of passion and despair, I besought him to abandon me to my fate. 'It will else engulf you, my father, as it has engulfed my mother!' I cried. 'Abandon me as a thing accursed! In that alone is your safety; otherwise you are lost. I alone am the hungering demon's target!' He laughed and a sudden suggestion struck him as he drew me yet closer to his side. 'Target—a good new name!' said he. 'Nothing could be fitter. Henceforth it shall be ours. I am no longer Benjamin Wormser, but Benjamin Target; and you, my beautiful child, are Waifa Target until—until, though God forbid the necessity! you become something else.' And then he laughed, and kissed me. But Waifa Target have I remained from that hour, and doubtless shall remain unto the end."

For the first time, as she came to a fresh pause, Evelyn interposed a few words, though with some diffidence, as if under a sort of spell that he found difficulty in shaking off.

"You say many warnings were received by you from time to time from your mysterious enemy?" said he.

"Yes."

"Were they invariably written warnings?"

"Save in two instances, without counting this evening's warning, which you heard with your own ears, yes."

"Were the verbal warnings in the same voice?"

"Yes—identical with what you heard."

"And equally mysterious?"

"More so; and whether ventriloquial or not, equally terrifying."

At that instant the mysterious voice burst upon them again.

"Fools!" it cried, with a ripple of mocking, diabolical laughter; "plot, plot against the unseen as ye may, its doom must overtake ye still!"

Waifa paled, but controlled her terror by a great effort.

"It has found me out even here, you see," said she, gloomily.

"Wait!" exclaimed Evelyn, who had sprung to his feet.

CHAPTER V.

A HUMAN SLEUTH-HOUND—WAIFA'S TERRIBLE STORY CONTINUED.

QUICKLY opening the door, he stepped into the passage at the head of the stairs, whence, on his arrival, he had noticed a narrow flight of steps ascending to a trap door.

"That voice was projected from overhead," said he, in a low voice. "I could swear to it."

He ran up the steps, and threw open the trap, but the square aperture was too narrow for his broad shoulders to pass through.

"Wait!" said Waifa, who had followed at his heels; and she stepped to the head of the stair, calling out, "Liz!" in a soft but penetrative voice.

Evelyn had stepped back into the passage.

"Is the child trustworthy?" he asked.

"Yes, and insensible to fear."

And just then Liz made her appearance from below, grinning secretly from ear to ear.

But a dozen words of instruction were required, and she glided up the steps, disappearing through the opening, with scarcely a sound.

"This house is but two stories and a half high," said Waifa, as they waited in the passage, which was fairly lighted. "The next one is yet lower, and next to that is a one-story coal office, thus making a series of approaches overhead from the street."

"Have you remarked this before?"

"Yes, at my first coming here."

"And never feared for your security?"

"There was no need. What must be will be."

"You are something of a fatalist?"

"Altogether, and perforce."

They had not to wait long. There was a sound of the street door softly opening and shutting, and Newspaper Liz came fluttering up the stairs, as before, with merely an "I-told-you-so" sort of addition to her comical grin.

"No one on the roofs?" queried her young mistress.

"Only a tomcat, mum."

"You encountered no one, then?"

"Only Mr. Clape, our bookkeeper, who was stalking past the front door as I slipped back."

Waifa and Evelyn exchanged a glance as Liz was once more dismissed to the lower floors.

"This is inexplicable," said Evelyn, when they were once more seated before the fire. "The man who jostled me at the entrance, and presumably pinned the writing to my sleeve, was certainly not Clape."

"And neither was the warning voice his. I have studied the subject. There is an individuality in ventriloquism, as in the natural voice. Moreover, I heard this warning one for the first time years ago, before Mr. Clape could have dreamed of my existence."

"How account, then, for the coincidence of his lurking near the house now?"

"The coincidence, if not accidental, remains unaccountable; the mere fact of his lurking in the neighborhood less so."

Evelyn reflected, and then looked annoyed.

"I understand. The fellow loves you?"

"He has tried to tell me so."

There was an awkward silence, which the young woman was the first to break.

"Shall I resume my story?" she asked.

"By all means, if you will be so kind. That is, if the interruption has not unnerved you."

"I am hopeless at times, but not often unnerved." And Miss Target resumed the thread of her story exactly where it had been broken off:

"We settled near Omaha, where my foster-father purchased a small farm, which, together with his shoemaking, and in spite of his inexperience, furnished us with a subsistence. For three years we obtained immunity from our persecutor. They were blissful years for me—almost the only ones I have ever known appreciatively. I studied, worked, enjoyed myself, and rapidly grew apace. I learned to ride, to row, to fish, to hunt—indeed, as a markswoman I grew so proficient as to be considered something of a phenomenon in our section. Our neighbors were wont to laughingly associate my new surname with my skill at target shooting, little suspecting the true and fateful suggestion that had given birth to the name itself. Then we had a rather mysterious Frenchwoman, a teacher of languages, who came to board with us, and help about the house. She called herself Madame Alceste, but had been a great lady—a countess, as she claimed—in her own country. But her attainments were genuine, and she was a real lady. She imparted much to me, and, next to my foster-father, was my best friend. But our immunity was limited. One day, soon after attaining my fifteenth year, when I was riding alone upon the prairie, I found myself suddenly confronted by three horsemen. They had the general appearance of ruffianly cowboys, but in one, a sinister figure, whose face I could not distinctly see, I intuitively recognized my secret foe. To wheel my horse, and flee, was the work of an instant, but they at once dashed in pursuit. 'Tis she!' I heard the sinister stranger exclaim, in a joyful voice. 'A cool thousand for her capture, or, failing that, for her death!' My horse was the better animal, and I began to widen the gap behind. Then there were three shots in swift succession, and I felt the bullets whistle near.

"I always carried a revolver in those days. Maddened with the thought that I had been tracked to my new retreat, I turned in my saddle and responded twice in kind. I only noticed that one of my pursuers reeled in his seat, his companions halting at his side as if disconcerted, and in a few minutes I had left them out of sight.

"Distressed as I was, I made no mention of my adventure upon arriving home. But my

pursuing fate was no more to be silenced than escaped. That evening the mysterious voice for the first time, apparently coming from nowhere in particular, rung in our ears, warning us of impending calamity, as we sat together around our evening lamp. Wormser started, and then a haggard resignation came into his face, as if he had long been expecting the blow. I could only bow my head with a guilty and despairing feeling. But Madame Alceste was immoderately terrified. She was, I believe, a Spiritualist, and ascribed the voice to a superhuman origin. To relieve her, she was made acquainted with my past history, but this only increased her fright.

"The next day Wormser received legal notice that the deed of his little property was disputed by one Dalrymple, a dreaded desperado of the vicinity, and that he would retain possession at his peril. Knowing the incontestability of his claim, my guardian paid no attention to the notice. 'It is but a subterfuge—a part and parcel of the old haunting villainy,' said he, calmly. 'No need of running away from it again; let us meet it when it comes.' And, after looking over his shotgun that hung above his bench, he quietly went on with his cobbling.

"A week later, the house was attacked at the dead of night during the prevalence of a frightful storm. A volley from without, fairly rattling the doors and shutters, was our first notification of the assault, but neither Wormser nor I was dismayed. The persecution had rendered us desperate. Hurrying on our garments, we sprung to the loop-holes that had been prepared, and replied to the attack with such chance deadliness that it was not resumed. We heard more than one groan as our cowardly assailants took themselves off in the stormy darkness.

"Madame Alceste occupied a little room in our cottage loft, with which we had no communication after her room door was fastened shut, as had been her custom upon retiring. She had not put in an appearance during the firing, though we had heard her moving, as we thought, overhead. Now all was silent. She might have perished of affright, or by a random bullet. Her door being still fastened, Wormser burst it in, and we entered. Madame Alceste had disappeared. There were indications of her having hurriedly dressed herself, and of her having then been dragged by force out of the one little window of the room, probably after being gagged.

"Wheels within wheels! mystery within mystery! What has become of her? What could my persecutor want with the poor, weak woman? I have never seen or heard of her to this day.

"Next day my foster-father notified by messenger the county authorities and an Omaha lawyer of his acquaintance of what had taken place. The former promised protection, a note from the latter assured Wormser of the validity of his title to the land, besides bidding him to stand by his rights.

"The promised protection came not until too late to save; the advice (how cheap a charity is good advice, sir!) was inapplicable to our situation.

"A few evenings later, Wormser was smoking his pipe in the fading sunset light. He was in his favorite seat in our little vine-curtained porch. Unperceived, I was watching him. In spite of his assumed cheerfulness, there was a hunted look in his eyes. He had grown so worn and old-looking that a great pain was at my heart. In a sudden passion of bitterness, I threw myself upon his neck. 'Let me go, my father!' I sobbed. 'Let me take my fateful presence from your side, I beseech you, before you also shall have paid the penalty of befriending me! Let me go away, if only for a time. I can write to you often. We need not be separated in spirit, even while I am seeking my fortune in some distant city. Only let me go! Greatly affected, he nevertheless would not hear of it. I persisted. He peremptorily ordered me to be silent—never to allude to the subject again. Knowing that this was solely for my sake, I still persisted. With impatience rather than anger, he disengaged my arms, thrusting me aside from him with some violence.

"At the same instant, there was a dazzling, noiseless flash. Wormser gave a cry, and his noble head sunk. A bowie-knife, hurled with deadly expertness from somewhere amid a clump of shrubbery at our garden gate, was quivering hilt-deep in his throat—in the place where my neck, for whom the deathblow had been meant, had nestled the very instant before. I threw myself forward with a shriek, but my foster-father was already dead—that devoted heart had ceased to beat before my young bosom could again be aware of a last fluttering throb.

"The air-born voice, for the second and last time until you, Mr. Evelyn, and I first heard it together, rung out once more, though I scarcely heeded it in that agonizing moment. 'Baffled again, but not defeated!' it exclaimed. 'But, doomed one, be warned in time! Avoid all friendship, all protection, if you would not include still others in your doom! Then there was a patter of hoofbeats on the turfy road, and I was alone with my dead.'

The narrator paused, with a slight shiver. Quickly recovering her composure, she fastened her beautiful but melancholy eyes upon her auditor with impressive earnestness.

"Must I go on?" she asked. "Would you have further proofs of the fatality that attends my very proximity, as was attested by your poor father's doom?"

He made an impatient gesture.

"Go on, go on!" said he, feverishly. Waifa—poor child—good God! how I sympathize with you. Do go on!"

Her eyes moistened for an instant, but they were dry and gloomy again as she went on obediently:

"Other hoofbeats, louder and more numerous, sounded at the cottage gate. They were those of the sheriff and his men—the authoritative protection that had been so generously supplied us. My sobbing words (fragments torn from my shattered heart!) and the bleeding spectacle before them were sufficiently ironical of the lively succor that had been afforded.

"A will had been left, and I was Wormser's heir. A week after the tragedy, with the proceeds of the little property in my pocket, I was on my way southward, leaving my last and only friend in his prairie grave. The money realized was nearly three thousand dollars, the property having appreciated greatly since our purchase. But I was poorly dressed, with my comeliness disfigured by an untasteful hat and veil, the latter nearly concealing my face. Desperate as I was, the blood of youth was in my veins, and I still clung to life. I still hoped to baffle my pursuer. My baggage consisted of those two trunks you can see in yonder corner. The larger contained my wardrobe and a few treasured keepsakes reserved from my murdered foster-parent's household possessions. The smaller—that little old-fashioned one—contained and still contains the belongings of my vanished friend, poor Madame Alceste. I have never examined them thoroughly, but she also had a strange history, which I may sometime relate to you, and I consider them sacred for the sake of the love she bore me.

"I had hit upon St. Louis as my destination—as a community perhaps sufficiently large and crowded to lose my unfortunate identity therein. Though without references, I might have sought employment as a teacher of music, or a governess; for I was large for my age, with a general appearance of maturity. But I preferred a humbler walk, as perhaps offering a better chance for concealment. I started out as a person most willing to learn, but without experience. It chanced that the first place I applied to was a paper-box manufactory. I was taken on. My first month's work was without remuneration. I was naturally apt, and was moreover industrious, painstaking and observant. After my probation four dollars a week were willingly assured to me. Expensive fancy boxes was one of the specialties of the establishment. I made a number of designs for work, which were acted upon with profit. At the end of six months, I was receiving ten dollars a week, with light manual labor, but some responsibility. I felt proud and happy, with a growing sense of security. Vain hope! Toward the end of the year, I was suddenly discharged without warning. My relentless, unseen enemy had tracked me down again at last."

CHAPTER VI.

HOUNDED, HUNTED AND TRACKED—WAIFA'S TERRIBLE STORY CONCLUDED.

"WHAT!" interposed Evelyn; "was there no explanation from the firm?"

"None was vouchsafed. But I subsequently learned, indirectly, that they had received, anonymously, a sketch of my past history, together with the usual warning concerning me. It was sufficient."

"What unmitigated cowardice!"

"No; the natural instinct of self-preservation—nothing more. Listen: My usefulness and, especially, my inventive capacity were well known. I had no difficulty in securing employment with a rival manufacturer. To make surer, I confided my history to him beforehand. He was a bluff, hardy man. 'Only do as well by me as you did by Blank & Co., and you're all right,' said he. 'Stick by me and I'll stick by you.' My services pleased him greatly. In a few months, however, he showed me his anonymous warning, to the effect that his manufactory would be burnt if I were not cast loose at once. I bowed my head submissively. 'I shall leave you at once,' said I. He laughed. 'You shall do nothing of the sort,' said he. 'Stick by me and I'll stick by you.' He laughed again, tore up the warning, and doubled his safeguards against fire. Nevertheless, in less than a week there was mysterious incendiarism, and he was burned out. After that, he told me he was very sorry indeed, but—well, we separated.

"Almost in despair, I remained idle and secluded for some weeks in a species of apathy. Then a new idea struck me. As I have said, I was tall, well-grown and muscular for my age—in fact, larger than many a young man who is not considered noticeably undersized. This time

my disguise should be radical. I would be a man, or youth, and seek employment as such. The transformation was speedily effected, and, after mastering my first sensations, which were those of shame and even self-degradation, I rather liked it. Then it occurred to me that I might succeed as a detective. I had always been a good mimic, and the profession had, moreover, constantly charmed my imagination.

"My third or fourth application for detective work was successful. Placed on trial, some light cases were given me, and prosecuted satisfactorily to my chief. Sometimes alone, but mostly associated with others, I was intrusted with more important affairs. I would have advanced rapidly but for an obstacle, which at last became insuperable. I allude to the personality of my associates—with few exceptions, rough, coarse and even vicious men—and to my duties frequently leading me amid scenes unconquerably repugnant to my maidenly instincts. At last, when I could stand it no longer, I made a confidant of my chief, who was a fine man with a family, including grown daughters, to whom he was devoted. He was astonished at my revelation, with regard to my sex especially, but sympathized with the shrinking nature of my objections. Acting on his advice, though with secret misgivings, I resumed my femininity, so to speak, and received some commissions as a female detective, though not so many as before. Still I was grateful for what I got, and would have succeeded generally but for the old, the fatal obstacle.

"No longer disguised as to my sex, my secret enemy, the marplot of my life, again tracked me down.

"The system of anonymous warnings was again brought to bear, this time accompanied by signal proofs of hidden and malignant ability to enforce the demands. Even my chief, brave and hardy as he naturally was, became first mystified, then impressed, then alarmed, and with the usual result.

"A few days after my discharge, I was sitting at the open window of my humble lodgings, full of such reflections as only the banned, the ostracized, the wholly isolated from human joy and sympathy, can know. My struggling three years in St. Louis had at last wound up with failure and defeat. The window overlooked sunshiny gardens, where not a foe or evil thing might be supposed to lurk, and my pretty canary, my only pet, was warbling gayly just inside the room, suspended among some hanging flower-baskets near at hand. Suddenly I bowed my face in my hands, and, for the first time since kneeling at my foster-father's grave, I sobbed and wept.

"My bird at the same instant had ceased to sing, and a feeble fluttering called by attention to its cage. I gave a hopeless cry. There had been no report, no whistling sound, and yet the bird was in the agonies of death—torn to pieces by the bullet (probably from an air-gun), which I had unconsciously escaped by that sudden bowing of my head in my hands, and which had spent its deadly force on the opposite wall.

"The following evening I received by mail the last threatening missive that has been addressed to me by my relentless foe—my dread Invisibleness, as I have come to consider him.

"The night after that I was on my way to New York, in perhaps a last endeavor to escape pursuit amid the thronging crowds of the great metropolis. Fortune or Fate (ah! Fate alone, and the vilest Fate at that, it must have been!) led me into the employment of your firm. You know the rest, sir, and the fatal consequences. My story is done."

Evelyn had scarcely moved during the entire narrative, which had consumed the greater part of an hour.

He now solemnly took Waifa's hand, and in such a way that she could not but gratefully return its profoundly heartfelt and sympathizing pressure.

Then he spoke:

"Waifa, you believe in me? You believe in my sympathy, my friendship, even in my love, which, however, I solemnly promise never to urge again without your express permission?"

"I do believe in you, George," said she, simply.

"Thank you. And from this hour you accept of my shoulder-to-shoulder comradeship in this battle to the death with our common foe—in our pursuit of the pursuer—in a war-to-the-knife quest of the murderer of your peace and my poor father? Speak!"

"Nay, but it isn't fair to you. You cannot fully appreciate—"

He waved his hand with a grave impatience.

"Answer me."

She had withdrawn her hand, and was nervously clasping it in the other.

"Think of no apparent sacrifice upon my part," he went on. "Since you possess my heart irrevocably, it is you, Waifa, who will sacrifice my peace of mind, should you refuse. Now answer me."

Her cheeks flushed, and for an instant he almost caught his breath as he read the trustful significance of her glorious uplifted gaze.

Then it was with firmness, and with no reser-

vation, that she again placed her shapely hand in his.

"I do accept of all that you have just professed," said she. "God help and guide us both! but we are comrades from this hour."

The compact was as inviolable as if sealed by many oaths, or solemnized by impressive ceremonies, and from that moment they addressed each other exclusively, when alone, by their familiar Christian names—though Waifa's could hardly be considered a familiar, or at least a family, one, for that matter.

"Now to business, and to the future!" said George, contentedly rubbing his hands. "In the first place—"

There was a low, chuckling laugh from nowhere in particular, and the mysterious voice interrupted them once again.

"To business, and to the future?" it mocked. "Fools! as if ye had a future, other than is doomed!"

They were this time less startled than annoyed.

Still, how to combat an Invisibleness, that also seemed an all-hearing Ubiquity!

Presently a new thought seemed to strike the young woman. She raised her right hand, and made a number of rapid signs with the fingers.

A look of pleased surprise came into Evelyn's face, and, greatly to her satisfaction, he responded in kind.

"What!" she went on in the same voiceless way; "you, too, are an adept in the one-handed sign-language of the deaf and dumb?"

His reply was as rapid and skillful as her question.

"Yes; I learned it of a college chum, who afterward became my inseparable friend, but is now no more."

"Strange! and I from a deaf-mute school-mate, who is also dead."

"This is doubly fortunate."

"It is."

"We can now oppose speechlessness to eaves-dropping—sign-language to ventriloquism."

"True; this is a strong point in our favor."

There was a pause. It would not do, literally, to say that there was a silence, since none had been broken by these intelligent interchanges. Then, as before, Evelyn took up the soundless colloquy.

"A minor character in your strange life-romance impressed me forcibly; the French-woman, Madame Alceste."

"Ah!"

"Yes. Her coming into your haunted home-life was strange; her passing out of it yet more so."

"True."

"Did you never suspect that she might have had some connection, though perhaps an unwilling one, with your persecutor?"

"Never."

"Yet the idea is not illogical. Think it over now, and tell me what you think of it."

Waifa's fair brows contracted. She was evidently reflecting profoundly.

"I am confused—everything is chaotic just now," was her response, after a long pause. "But there seems a good deal in the suggestion. Let us dismiss the subject for an afterthought."

"Good! Now as to Clape. Call to mind that he was engaged as our bookkeeper directly after your first employment by us."

"I have thought of that."

"And he afterward—after the tragedy—dropped unguarded expressions, such as made it possible for him to have acquainted himself with some of the documents, intrusted by you to my poor father's safe-keeping, and afterward presumably stolen by the assassin?"

"Yes. I will conceal nothing. He ventured to declare his passion for me. It was at lunch time, and he came upon me among the deserted pasting tables, when I chanced to be alone. His manner was neither offensive nor disrespectful, but I chose to take his words as an unwarranted liberty, which I rebuked, requesting him never to address me again, save as our business relations rendered necessary. He smiled in a way that I disliked. I emphasized my rebuke, with some temper. This nettled him. He used these hasty words: 'What have you to be so proud of? You couldn't prove a wealthy and honorable extraction, even with the required birth-marks to back your claim, and your one enemy is sleepless as he is secret!' Then, biting his lip, as if angry with himself, he strode away. That was all. But he could have known nothing, especially of my birth-marks, without having at least scanned some of those missing papers."

"Might he not have guessed well, though at hazard?"

"No. Birth-marks are not ordinary possessions."

"True; and then his allusion to your secret enemy is also against him."

"Yes."

"And his being in this neighborhood this very night?"

"Also against him. But then my address is no secret; and perhaps he still affects me, and not hopelessly in his own estimation. My espionage of this afternoon proved him a man of reckless,

unbridled pursuits when released from his daily hypocrisy."

"That is true. Shall we continue shadowing Clape?"

"I think that is best, at least until a more promising clew offers itself."

They had insensibly dropped the sign language, and were now conversing in low, earnest tones.

So earnest, indeed, were they that at this moment the house bell sent up its tinkle from the lower floor without their noticing it.

"I agree with you," said Evelyn. "Best keep him under espionage from time to time until we can thoroughly formulate our plans."

"Yes; for though it seems convincing, on the evidence of the gilt button, that Clape could not have been the actual murderer of Eliphalet Evelyn, we have a right to suspect him of something wrong."

"Exactly; and we must give him no intimation of our suspicion."

"And as yet Clape can have no inkling of our compact," said Waifa. "I feel morally certain of this. Then as I shall doubtless succeed in getting thoroughly into his confidence, through my disguise of this afternoon—"

A rap on the door interrupted her, and then Mrs. Cavanaugh, Waifa's landlady, made her appearance, with the impish face of Liz peering in from behind her, forming all sorts of soundless syllables with her expressive mouth and eyes as a sort of warning to her young mistress.

"If you please, ma'm," said Mrs. Cavanaugh, "there is a gentleman in the hall as wants to see you quite particular, though I did not ketch the name he gave. I told him you was engaged with a visitor, ma'm, but he insisted on waitin' in the hall."

"C-l-a-p-e!" was the word that Liz was trying to convey by the facial pantomime in which she was indulging.

"Excuse me," said a soft voice behind the landlady.

And then Mr. Clape himself, having noiselessly followed up the stairs, bowed himself ceremoniously into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLAIRVOYANTE'S BROTHER.

"OH, why, it is Mr. Clape!" said Waifa, bowing composedly, after the first inward surprise; and Evelyn also preserved his impenetrability.

Clape gave a just-perceptible start on perceiving who her visitor was, and then, bowing gravely, helped himself to a chair without waiting for one to be offered him.

"Miss Target," said he, in a business-like way, as soon as the door was closed upon the landlady and Liz, much at least to the latter's dissatisfaction, "I trust you will pardon my liberty in calling when you shall have heard the important nature of my errand."

He included Evelyn in his audience by a deeply respectful gesture, and Waifa bowed rather chillingly.

"I have come," continued Mr. Clape, with some diffidence, either real or assumed, "with regard to that lost package of yours—or—the valuable documents, you know, that disappeared from—or—the lamentable, indeed, the shocking occurrence that I need not name."

Waifa was looking at him now, all eyes and ears, while Evelyn, remained impassive, but alert.

"What about them?" exclaimed the young woman.

"I think," said Mr. Clape, thoughtfully, "that I shall presently be able to lay my hand upon a certain clew to their recovery. That is all."

Waifa was both eager and confused, being half-fearful of a trap of some sort. In her dilemma, she threw an appealing look toward Evelyn.

"Miss Target has made me her counsel in this case," said Evelyn, speaking up indolently. "Pray explain yourself without delay, as her anxiety is naturally great."

Mr. Clape bowed his head submissively.

"I will go right to the point," said he. "I live with an elder sister, sir, who is a professional clairvoyante. She is, moreover, a profoundly religious woman, which I had found, though you may find difficulty in believing it, to be not incompatible with her profession. Were she otherwise, I need hardly say that she and I would not be living together, but widely apart—physically no less than spiritually separated."

Evelyn smiled.

"That is not the point, Mr. Clape," said he, coldly.

"Coming to it, sir, coming! My sister's professional name is Madame Angelica di l'Estrella—or Madame Star-Angel, as you might render it in the vernacular. I have long had Miss Target's loss more deeply at heart than she probably conceives of. My solicitude on this matter being well-known to my gifted sister, she has upon several occasions, at my entreaty, thrown herself into the clairvoyant trance, in effort to search the unknown and the unseen for some trace of the missing package. Now as this discovery would doubtless be two-fold, if effected—that is, as it might also lead to the dis-

covery of the wretched assassin of Mr. Eliphalet Evelyn—

"We infer, then," interrupted Evelyn, abruptly, "that your gifted sister's clairvoyant efforts have thus far proved unsuccessful."

"Only in part, sir. She can follow the missing package, but only vaguely, indistinctly. It was in the hope of pursuing one of these indistinct threads of the clairvoyant vision that I chanced to pass this house an hour or so ago." Thus far there was no evasion of facts attempted, as his auditors inwardly admitted. "Then, having failed in this, and remembering Miss Target's address on our office books, it occurred to me to step in here, and acquaint her with my sister's ultimatum."

"Her ultimatum?"

"Yes, sir; and my having found you here at the same time, though altogether unexpectedly, may prove all the better."

"But the ultimatum—what is it?"

"My sister can follow up the clew no more, distinctly, without Miss Target's presence. That alone—the intimate proximity of Miss Target's spiritual aura, or magnetism I believe it is called—can stimulate my sister's clairvoyant condition to a perfectly clear-seeing capacity in this particular case. So my sister informs me. And even this assistance—Miss Target's presence—must be vouchsafed, if at all, under peculiar conditions."

Evelyn, who had little credulity for such things in his composition, felt a good deal like saying, "Oh, bosh!" if not showing Mr. Clape to the door into the bargain; but a glance at Waifa's face, which both a puzzle and a warning, restrained him.

"What," he asked, "are the peculiar conditions that your sister insists on?"

"Pardon me, sir." And Mr. Clape turned deferentially to the lady. "But the matter has now grown so personal to Miss Target—"

"Pray, go on, Mr. Clape," said Waifa, quietly. "You seem to have come here disinterestedly; so there can be no harm in hearing all you have to say."

"Thank you, ma'm," said Clape, gravely. "To-day is the twentieth of the month. My sister's conditions may sound fantastic. They are that you shall visit her, unaccompanied, at five minutes before midnight on the twenty-fourth—which would be next Sunday night—and remain alone with her for the space of one hour."

Evelyn was about to speak, perhaps advising Waifa not to give such a proposition a second thought, when she kept him silent by a flashing sign sentence with her left hand, apparently unperceived by the other, which was thus translated:

"Reflect; there is no danger, and this may prove an advantage for us."

Then, almost in the same breath, she addressed Mr. Clape.

"And what, sir," she asked, quietly, "does your gifted sister vouchsafe me, in return for a compliance with these strange conditions?"

Clape's reply was sufficiently prompt and to the point now.

"Absolute information as to the whereabouts of your missing packet," said he, "be the consequences what they may to their present criminal possessor, even though they bring him into the hangman's clutch, as, pray God, they may! Delia is sure of her power."

It was the first time that he had mentioned his sister familiarly, and there was a sudden heartiness in his words that was either unaffected, or the quintessence of dissimulation.

Still, Miss Target reflected a moment before answering.

"It is agreed, Mr. Clape," said she at last. "I shall comply with your sister's conditions; and I trust the result will be such as I can thank you for."

She arose suggestively as she spoke, and Mr. Clape, smilingly taking the hint, prepared to take his leave without further ceremony.

"My sister will be glad to know of your determination, Miss Target," said he, hat in hand. "She has taken a deep interest in your loss, which is not usual with her. Going my way—that is, Harlemward—Mr. Evelyn?"

"Not at this moment, Mr. Clape," was the polite reply; and then Evelyn couldn't resist the temptation for a parting shot. "Perhaps you will also be on hand for the midnight interview, eh, Clape?" he added.

Clape at first didn't seem to understand, and then he looked simply surprised.

"I? Oh, bless me, no, sir! Why, my sister wouldn't hear of such a thing, even if contemplated by me, which would be the height of impertinence. Then only think—Sunday night, too, when I would be worn out with my church and Sunday-school duties! A work-a-day life is home-life for me—church and regimental duties alternating! By the way, sir, I made all those collections this afternoon on my way home. Good-night, Mr. Evelyn! Good-night, Miss Target! Ah, thanks; you are very good."

And he smilingly slipped out of the door she was courteously holding open for him, and was gone.

Then Evelyn also prepared to go, remarking that it was late.

"Do wait, if but for a moment," said Waifa.

"Don't you see that I can shadow him every evening between now and the twenty-fourth?"

She said much more, seemingly feverishly uncertain of the wisdom of the engagement she had made, or anxious to justify it.

Evelyn smiled gravely, as he took her hand in his sober, earnest way.

"What is all this, my friend?" said he, gently. "Have I expressed any opposition to the stargazing, eternity-reading interview?"

She smiled, too, now.

"No, George, nor your approbation either," she replied. "And I hope you don't think me any more credulous or visionary than yourself."

"I am glad to hear you say that. The possible danger attendant upon the interview was all that hindered my approval of it. Heavens! have you thought of it? If this man and this woman should really have any connection with your deadly pursuer, and you should thus place yourself, alone and at midnight, in their power—"

She interrupted him by a sad gesture.

"Danger! peril!" she repeated, slowly. "Is aught to be accomplished without it? Danger—Menace—Dread! have they not been my shadowy handmaidens from my very infancy? And yet you would talk of a fresh peril, George, with alarm for me?"

"Still—"

But she silenced him yet again.

"Look around you here," she continued, "on these poor garret rooms. They are accessible to a murderous prowler from above or below, by roof or by entry, by gable window or by rickety door. I have that, to be sure," she pointed to a revolver hooked at the side of her modest couch in the adjoining room, "and I am a dead shot. But one must be awake to be on one's guard, and sleep is periodically necessary. Yet, apart from my apparent insecurity, what would avail me walls of stone and iron doors against him, my remorseless pursuer, should he get ready to make sure of me at last?"

George Evelyn paused, irresolute. How he longed to be able to take her in his arms, and make his broad breast the bulwark of her hunted life forevermore! But what could he say or do in the presence of this desperate philosophy, this calmness of despair?

"God keep you, Waifa!" was about all he could say. "We shall have time for further conference to-morrow. Good-night!"

She responded so cheerfully to his parting words, while calling up Liz to show him out, with such a commonplace smile, that he only vaguely felt the danger he was leaving her to.

The following afternoon, he was waiting alone in his office for Waifa's return from another shadowing of Clape's movements, as a preliminary to closing up for the day, when a messenger brought him a telegram, to this effect:

"Can't return. Meet me southern end Second Avenue Railroad Bridge ten o'clock to-night. W."

Evelyn was surprised. Waifa had said nothing about a possibility of her not coming back before dusk. What could it mean? But doubtless she knew best what she was about; and there was nothing left but to keep the appointment.

Since the death of his father, who had been his lifelong home-mate and companion, George Evelyn lived alone in the quaint old house in which he had been born, with a trusted old housekeeper and one servant. This, which had been his grandfather's house before him, was on the high ground between Fourth and Madison avenues, in upper Yorkville, and, indeed, had always been one of the landmarks of that progressive neighborhood—"changeless amid a world of change" under the name of the Old Evelyn Mansion.

A brave old garden, together with extensive grounds, surrounded the house; there were large stables attached, and the place gave a general impression of comfort, age and historical importance no longer often found on Manhattan Island.

"Mrs. Watrous," said George, as he prepared to go out after his lonely dinner, "I shall probably not be home till late."

The housekeeper, an ancient Quaker dame, who had been Evelyn's nurse, looked up with a sigh.

"Thee was late last night, too, George," said she, "and a tempest is moreover now threatening. Is it the godless habits of the Philistines thee would be taking for thy pattern, son?"

Evelyn smiled in his grave way, and patted the comfortable double chin that was perked up to him from over the good dame's knitting needles.

"Not so bad as that, trust to your pious old teaching for that, nurse," said he. "I have my key, so do not have any one sit up for me."

It was then nine o'clock, and, in order to consume the interval, George set out to walk leisurely to Harlem, the distance not being great, and the Third Avenue shop windows almost continuously cheering the direct way thither.

It wanted but five minutes to ten as he turned off from the animated bridge entrance at the head of Third Avenue, and, pushing along dimly-dark 129th street at the water's edge,

made his way warily toward the place of appointment.

The wind was rising, too, cold and bleak, and the sky was black.

"What can have chanced," grumbled Evelyn, as he stumbled on, "that Waifa should have asked me to meet her in this outlandish hole, I wonder?"

Arriving among the lumber piles and deserted wharfs near the entrance of the new bridge, which was not yet wholly completed, he looked about him, as well as the darkness would permit, still more discontentedly.

Suddenly a soft but penetrating voice—Waifa's voice, he made no doubt—called out to him from somewhere in the darkness.

"George, is it you?" was asked.

He wondered why he couldn't see, no less than hear her, at least something of her outline.

"Yes, it is I," he answered. "Where are you?"

"Close at hand, but we must not be seen together just here. I am watched. There is danger for both."

"What do you tell me?"

"This. I will follow you, while keeping unseen. Go out on the bridge as far as the midmost pier."

"Is the roadway finished there?"

"Not quite, but there is a lantern there. Hasten, and question not. Do you not recognize my voice. I have much to tell you at that secluded place."

Easier in his mind, but still much mystified by such blindman's-buff tactics, George questioned no further, but obeyed.

He was presently picking his way amid the debris-littered roadway of the bridge, with his eyes fixed upon a stationary red lantern in the middle for his pilot star.

"Are you following?" he called back, for he could hear no steps save his own.

"Yes, yes!" replied the familiar voice from somewhere behind; "be more trustful, and less frightened."

Frightened! Would Waifa have used that word in connection with him? Hardly, or at least not as she had known him but a few hours previous. What could it mean? Nevertheless, he kept on.

At last he reached the great timber supporting the safety lantern, on either side of which the parapet was yet unfinished, showing the faint glimmer of the deep tide-water far below.

"Well, here I am at last," said Evelyn, turning a little impatiently. "I hope you are satisfied."

"Perfectly!" was the hoarse, mocking response, as a powerful figure suddenly rose before him, knife in hand; "for I am here, too, and you are just where I want you."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ASSASSIN'S TRAP.

TAKEN by surprise, as he undoubtedly was, Evelyn did not for an instant lose his presence of mind.

"Tricked!" was all he said as the stranger sprang exultingly upon him; and then, evading the murderous down-stroke of the uplifted knife, he was locked in a furious death-struggle at the very edge of the unfinished parapet.

George Evelyn was an exceptionally muscular, athletic man, with an abundance of cool courage to back his great strength.

But it took but an instant's test to render him aware that his assailant, though of somewhat slighter build than he, was capable of exertions which, if not exactly superhuman, were as a hurricane to a zephyr compared with his.

All he could do was to evade the knife-thrusts by tightening close quarters to the utmost.

Otherwise, he was but as a reed in that silent, anaconda-like grasp.

Fortune for a moment seemed to favor him, though.

As the ruffian dragged him to one side, with the obvious intention of hurling him into the depths, his heel tripped on a stone, and he fell on his back, the dagger flying out of his hand.

Partly disengaging himself, Evelyn dealt him a tremendous fist-blow in the throat, and also reached for his revolver.

But at that instant he received a stunning blow from behind.

Then he was once more twined, hugged, suffocated in that original coiling, irresistible grasp.

For the first time, as he felt himself whirled dingly, helplessly over the dizzy brink, he gave utterance to a cry for help.

Was it answered?

Yes, and this time undoubtedly in Waifa's clear, resonant voice.

He even caught a glimpse of her graceful figure's outline springing along the bridge. There was a shot. Was it from her unerring hand? That second murderous figure, which had dealt him the dastard blow from behind—was he not reeling, as if smitten in his tracks?

Evelyn could see nothing more, for at that instant, projected from his assailant's grasp as if from a catapult, he was hurled out over the parapet.

Fortune again interposed to favor him, how-

ever, and his falling body did not reach the dark bosom of the water.

One of a series of guy-ropes stretching out from the foot of the pier broke his fall midway. He caught it under his armpit, clasped another rope within reach of his disengaged hand, and for the moment at least was out of the jaws of death, though dizzy and confused beyond measure.

He heard one more shot overhead, however, then a sound of flying feet, and then a voice—Waifa's voice—as of one peering down over the edge.

"Lost! lost!" he heard it exclaim, despairingly. "Ah, he is gone! my love, my hero! he is no more."

Glorious words! Her love, her hero! No wonder they inspired the reply that came up, though faintly, out of the darkness and the depths.

"Waifa! is it you?"

"Oh, joy!" this time rapturously; "what! you are there—you are alive?"

Again from the depths, and now much more energetically—so inspiring is love, so stimulating the accents of an adored voice!

"Yes, and not greatly injured, I believe—only a little dazed. If I could only look about me—if you could manage to lower the lantern—perhaps I could work my way up."

"Wait! Courage!"

The next moment the lantern, fastened to a chance found cord, was swinging over the ledge, its flickering rays ruddily illuminating the gearing to which Evelyn was clinging.

Fortunately the mast to which the guy ropes were appended reached slantingly up over the level of the roadway, and Evelyn had sufficient strength to take advantage of it.

After a few struggles, with some assistance from Waifa, he was once more on the bridge, and the lantern restored to its place.

He was faint and pale from his exertions, but with a glad look lingering in his face, while the flush of thankfulness over his deliverance still shone in her face and eyes as she stood there, inimitably lovely and graceful even in her masculine characterization.

But almost instantly, and as though by preconcert, the tenderer thread was broken, and the platonic freindliness resumed.

"It was not your voice," said Evelyn, "that bade me come to this spot, after all?"

"Heavens, no! How did you come into the neighborhood?"

"What! you did not even telegraph me?"

"Never!"

Evelyn made a despairing gesture.

"How can we hope to combat such *finesse*, such Machiavellianism?" he exclaimed. "Who could the slim Hercules have been who overcame me?"

"The Enemy—my arch-enemy! I am sure of it."

"And the other? There was another, for I was felled from behind."

"Yes; there was a confederate who, I am certain, got the taste of my marksmanship before he fled. Thank Heaven! that one accomplishment is still left me, unparalyzed! Even the principal—the Enemy himself—did not wait for a second trial of my skill on him, invulnerable as he has heretofore proved himself."

"But how and why were you here so opportunely?"

"To save you."

"Ah, you did that, Waifa. But where are you last from?"

"From prison."

Evelyn made another gesture of bewilderment.

"We are in the toils," said he, gloomily. "But listen." And he related succinctly what had happened since the receipt of the misleading telegram.

"Now it is my turn," said Waifa, "though my story can hardly be told so briefly."

"I was successfully shadowing Clape, as on the preceding afternoon. He was even more confidential, and seemed overjoyed to renew my acquaintance. But after one game of billiards, he excused himself to visit his lodgings, across the way, promising to return in a quarter of an hour."

"I seated myself at one of the saloon-tables, and called for a cup of beef-tea—now a sometime cold-weather beverage in bar-rooms, intending to await his return. Save the proprietor, there was but one other customer present. This was an oldish looking man, apparently drowsing over his beer at the little table directly behind me, to whom I had paid no attention."

"This man must have found an opportunity to drug my cup. At all events, I had no sooner drank it off than I was done for. I was both paralyzed and obstreperous, if you can understand the combination, and at the same time in a sort of painful dream, in which my soul seemed to have half-sloughed off its bodily tenement, as a serpent would its skin."

"Suddenly, through this dream, there hissed the exulting, the demoniac, the never-to-be-forgotten voice of my arch-foe. 'Sit here, lie here, or die here!' it hissed. 'Miserable child of misfortune! at ten o'clock your last and only friend will be in the middle of the Second Avenue

Railway Bridge, expecting to meet you there. He will meet me, his death instead. Adieu! When will you learn indubitably that your every friendship brings but ruin and destruction in its train?' It ceased, leaving me wild, horrified, yet incapable of intelligent speech or action."

"I became vaguely conscious of saying and doing extravagant things, of wrangling with the proprietor of the place and some new-comers, after that of being incontinently hustled out, and thrown into the street. Partly recovering my senses, but hardly able to stand, and suffering a horrible nausea, I next found myself before the sergeant's desk at a police station. Fortunately for me, one of the police physicians happened to be present, though by the merest accident."

"He had eyed me closely, as I was led, reeling, behind the rail. 'That young man is not drunk,' said he. 'Let me examine him.' He pronounced me to have been drugged. The sergeant was, luckily, a humane man. I was not considered under arrest, and he recommended me to lie down in his room."

"I did so, being too dazed for anything else. Fortunately, there was no suspicion excited as to my sex. I sunk first into a lethargy, then into a refreshing sleep, which lasted for some hours. It must have been an altogether unique drug that had operated upon me."

"At all events, I awoke from its effects not only refreshed, but invigorated, or at least, exhilarated. But a small clock in the room indicated but a few minutes to ten. I bounded from the couch, made some grateful acknowledgments to the considerate sergeant, and was off like the wind. I was in time to save you. That is all."

Evelyn silently grasped the *pseudo* young man's hand.

"Waifa," he began—

"Call me Gaines—Dick Gaines—when in this character," interposed his companion. "It is the pseudonym by which Clape knows me."

"Good! As I was perhaps about to say something soft, it had better remain unsaid. Let us be going homeward. Nothing more can be attempted to-night."

"Agreed; but have you fully recovered, sir?"

"A trifling dizziness remains, that is all. We must have a free foot in this affair hereafter. Every-day business and detective work cannot go hand in hand."

"You are, then, no longer despondent? In spite of the enemy's subtle power, you are resolved to see the awful mystery through?"

"To the death!"

It was now Waifa who took the other's hand, and her eyes glistened.

"Even for your own safety, I shall never try to dissuade you again," said she quietly. "Your determination is fixed, and we are henceforth in the same boat, sink or swim."

"Thank you for that; those words are precious to me."

They were now retracing their steps along the bridgeway, the noise of the shot having luckily attracted no outside attention to the locality.

"As to the manufactory," said the work-girl detective, "how shall you manage?"

"Easily, I fancy. Monday we shall begin to take an account of stock, when active operations must be suspended for a few days, according to our yearly custom. Then I shall take a month's absence from work, leaving Grubman, my faithful superintendent, with full power in the interim. He understands the business as thoroughly as I, and all my operatives are my partners now, as you are aware."

"Certainly; you run no risk in that regard. But as for me?"

They were coming off the bridgeway now. Evelyn smiled grimly.

"You are the chief of the detective brace," said he—"the sleuth-leader. I gladly subordinate my inexperience to your experience. You must resign your forewoman's place. Of course, I shall expect the wages to go on."

"Thanks, George; but that will not do."

"How?"

"You forget that I have something of my own in the savings bank. The proceeds of my foster-father's farm are intact."

"Ah! but still—"

"I won't hear of it, sir. You can defray our detective expenses—no more. I want one more privilege."

"Name it."

"An additional confederate in Newspaper Liz."

"Would that be wise?"

"The child is fearless, faithful and discreet. She is also apt at disguises—a born mimic. I believe she can be of use to us."

"With all my heart, then. So everything is agreed. But what roundabout way are you leading me?"

"Through 127th street. It is well that you should be acquainted with the house occupied by Clape and his star-reading sister."

"To be sure! But first tell me if you suspect his connivance in the plot to drug you."

"I know just as much about it as you do—no more, no less. In the mean time, he is welcome to the benefit of the doubt. Here we are."

They had come to a pause in front of the saloon, now closed, which had been the scene of Waifa's disagreeable experience, and directly opposite the Clape house.

It was a shabby, three story dwelling, with an old-fashioned stoop and basement area, inclosed in rusty railings, and gave the impression of being half-squeezed to death between two lofty apartment houses of a poor class that raised their towering walls on either side of it.

The windows of the second floor were lighted up, but the street below was in unrelieved obscurity, thus facilitating furtive observation from without.

"The lighted second floor is occupied by the clairvoyante, whose signboard is below," explained Waifa, in a low voice. "The third floor back is Clape's room. The rest of the house is also occupied by madame. The adjoining tenements are filled with families, also chiefly foreigners, and some of them of suspicious belongings. But hush!"

A shadow had flitted across one of madame's closed window-curtains.

Then the curtain was drawn up, the sash also raised, and a woman, doubtless the clairvoyante-proprietress, leaned indolently out upon her elbows, as if finding the cold air an agreeable change from that of overheated rooms.

An exceptionally tall and muscular, but withal graceful woman of middle age, with a face never, once seen, to be forgotten—perhaps a face to often dream of, though not altogether pleasantly—it was so beautiful, so calm, so majestic, so inscrutable, and yet so remorselessly and intellectually cruel!

It might have been the impenetrable mask of a Sphinx-like heart which, like that of Zanoni's terrible sharer of the life-elixir secret in Bulwer's fantastic novel of the name, which had looked, unmoved, on the destruction of nations, the lapse of generations, and the hecatombs of old wars.

"Where have I seen that face, or its prototype, before?" thought Evelyn, impressed in spite of himself. "Doubtless in some ideal picture of Jezebel or the Wandering Jew."

As for Waifa—who also now saw the woman for the first time—she was yet more strongly, if somewhat more vaguely, impressed.

"What am I dimly reminded of by that awfully faultless face?" she said to herself. "Of the Enemy—my mysterious pursuer himself? No; hardly that. And yet it strikes me with a prophetic fear—an ominous dread of I know not what—and I feel instinctively that this individuality is in some strange way interwoven with my future and my fate!"

The woman only remained in view for a moment, and neither Evelyn nor his companion felt like commenting upon her appearance, and its odd effect upon them, as they moved away.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRONG GIRL AND A STRONGER WOMAN.

ON the Saturday evening following these adventures, soon after Mr. George Evelyn had finished his dinner, he was asked for by a prim, white-chokered, rather sanctimonious-looking young man, dressed in the deepest black of a ministerial cut, whom the good dame, Mrs. Watrous, being a very religious woman, received with a great deal of respect, notwithstanding he was a total stranger to her.

"A visitor for you, sir," said she, surprising her young master at the beginning of his post-prandial cigar a moment later. "He's waiting in the parlor. And oh, Mr. George, such a good, such a beautiful young man!"

"Ah, indeed. He sent in his name, of course?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hezekiah Meek."

"Don't know him. Must be some mistake." "But he says he's come by appointment, Mr. George. He's to attend some entertainment with you—some ball, where a young prodigy from Alabama hurls five-hundred-pound men and women around the stage like little dolls, under spiritual influence, or magnetic fluid, or something or other."

"Oh!"

And, bursting into his dry laugh, George hastened to join his visitor, who was none other than our work-girl detective in another of her male disguises.

"Good enough, Mr. Meek!" said Evelyn, surveying the *pseudo* divinity student with critical admiration. "This cut does happy-go-lucky Dick Gaines, two to one. Your own mother wouldn't know you."

"You forget, sir, that the maternal relation is one, alas! that has been wholly denied to me," said the other, rolling up her eyes, and with such a sepulchral drawl that Evelyn was almost deceived by it. "But come," and she resumed her natural voice and manner, with a smile, "shall we not be going?"

"You made an excellent impression on my housekeeper," said Evelyn, when they were on their way down town. "The good old soul thinks me in excellent company. Where is Liz?"

"On duty. She will not fail us."

"Do you feel sure that Clape and his sister will attend the exhibition?"

"I only know what he said after I had de-

clined to be one of his party. However, Liz will look out for that."

The exhibition was not in a hall, but in a theater, the doors of which were thronged with in-goers when our friends arrived there, for the mysterious muscular feats of Miss Dudu Gumper, the Child Phenomenon from Alabama, as she was everywhere pictured and billed, had become one of the sensations of the hour.

A pretty little flower-girl, with her boardful of buttonhole nosegays, importuned them as they formed in line at the ticket office.

"Do buy, sir!" she chirruped, playfully poking Evelyn in the micriff with the sharpest corner of her board. "Just one, sir; or I'll sell out the lot at a real bargain."

"No, thank you!" with a laugh, and then he turned to his companion. "But hold on! Waifa—Meek, my boy, perhaps you would like a *boutonniere*?"

But the latter had already chosen and paid for one, while the little vender sidled away with a peculiar laugh.

"Didn't you recognize her?" she whispered.

"Whom?"

"The flower-girl. It was Liz."

"You don't say so!"

"Hush! and look here." She drew out of the *boutonniere* a scrap of paper, inscribed with the two numbers, which she passed to him, unperceived. "These are the seats you are to secure, if possible."

"Oho!" he muttered; "why, the girl is a little trump."

The required seats were fortunately obtainable, and in a few minutes the friends were seated in them, close to the middle aisle of the parquet, and directly behind two others that were already occupied by Mr. William Clape and Madame Angelica di l'Estrella.

The house was crowded, and the performance of the Alabama prodigy proved to be really an extraordinary one.

She was a stout, fresh-looking girl of sixteen, who made no claim for occult agency in the performance of her feats of strength (a strange power, which she could not understand, enabled her to do them, and that was all she could say,) which were, nevertheless, little short of superhuman.

She swung whole benchfuls of men and women all over the stage with apparently little more exertion than the light clasp of the settee-back by her plump hands.

Powerful men, grasping, singly or as many as could find room to hold on by, the opposing side of a stout cane in her hands, were whirled until breathless, this way and that, like straws.

A dozen men tried to hold down a chair, on whose back her hands were carelessly resting, but in vain.

One well-known prize-fighter in broadcloth and diamonds essayed the test. But, metaphorically speaking, the irrepressible Dudu fairly wiped up the floor with him, without turning a hair, or losing for an instant the expansive good-humor of her electrotyped smile.

A bulky man-about-town, notorious for his sporting proclivities and ton-tossing brawn, advanced to the ordeal with a jaunty "you-won't-come-any-tricks-on-me," sort of air, and was literally sent flying by the imperturbable prodigy, to the undignified dishevelment of his hair, his bosom-pin and his watch-guard.

The spectators were both mystified and astounded, and consequently gratified their money's worth.

"Step right up, gentlemen, and give Miss Gumper a fresh test!" called out the prodigy's manager, in the professional nasal twang so familiar with showmen. "We don't know how this mysterious power is originated. Miss Dudu herself doesn't know. It may be spiritualistic, it may be electrical, it may be magnetic, and then again it mayn't. But, unsophisticated schoolgirl as she is, fresh from the artless mountain district of old Alabama, she gets there all the same, and she is here for your entertainment. Step right up!"

A fresh batch of candidates advanced, sheepishly but determinedly, to the test, only to be disposed of, amid great laughter and applause, more summarily than their predecessors.

"Nothing but sheer strength and tact!" murmured, in one of the intervals, a low voice near Evelyn and his companion. "Strength and skill, perhaps somewhat aided by occult, mediumistic power!"

They were sure the words were the clairvoyante's, whose back had thus far alone been presented to them, though Clape himself had turned and recognized Evelyn, with a smirking smile, from the beginning.

"Any more to step up, and give Miss Dudu a trial?" continued the nasal exhibitor, with increased urbanity. "What! have the sterner sex had sufficient conviction? Don't be bashful, gentlemen. Or perhaps some lady present would like to give our mountain girl a turn?" And there was an attendant roar of laughter at the preposterousness of the proposition.

Then there was a surprised hush, for a lady—none other than Madame Angelica di l'Estrella, in fact—had gracefully risen, and was advancing to the platform, in response to the suggestion.

None, apparently, was more nonplused than the nasal professor himself, though he quickly recovered.

"Step up, madam," said he, blandly lending his aid. "This is an unexpected honor, whatever may be your expectations with regard to our mountain wonder."

Before replying, the clairvoyante, after a single searching glance at Miss Dudu, who for the first time seemed to grow disconcerted, turned, with a grandly deprecating courtesy to the theater.

The effect was both prepossessing and imposing. She was superbly dressed, yet in faultless taste, her furs and rich robe setting off her singularly tall, athletic figure to the best advantage. Splendid diamonds glittered at her throat and ears. She wore a picturesque Rembrandtish hat, gracefully plumed, in tasteful keeping with her noble carriage, her plentiful dark hair, her brilliant eyes and her majestic beauty of countenance, which had somehow lost its namelessly cruel and remorseless characteristic, and was now but simply and yet grandly impressive.

"My expectations," she responded, in a clear, musical voice that easily reached everywhere, "are simply to prove that I am stronger, in muscle, spirit and will, than the young lady on exhibition."

She then quietly laid off her sealskin cloak, and turned back her diamond-fastened cuffs, in a quietly business-like way, that completed her captivity of the spectators, already raised to the highest pitch of suppressed excitement.

"That woman is far more of a prodigy than the performer," said Evelyn to his companion, in the carefulest of whispers. "See; she has already made them lose countenance, disguise it as they may. She is an extraordinary character."

The pseudo young Mr. Meek's response, equally guarded, was more laconic.

"She is terrible!" was the reply.

Then there roar a war of excitement, and their attention was riveted upon the stage, where Madame Angelica di l'Estrella was already demolishing the stock-in-trade of the mountain wonder like a house of cards, to the confusion of the wonder herself, the panic of the nasal exhibitor, and the enthusiasm of the spectators.

The wonder essayed the chair trick, but in vain. The chair would not budge an inch with madame's stately corporosity anchored therein, at the most earnest insistence on the wonder's part.

Then came the cane test, in which, with seemingly but careless exertion on the part of the clairvoyante, the tables were incontinently turned upon the mountain prodigy, who was danced, whirled, thrashed and twisted here, there and everywhere, and finally almost stood on her head in the most conspicuous corner of the stage.

"I was opposed to Delia's going on," whispered Clape, turning to Evelyn with some natural excitement in his manner. "But, gad, sir! I'm glad she went now. If the prodigy's a charlatan, she ought to be exposed, and my sister is the woman to do it."

"She is certainly ahead at this stage of the battle," said Evelyn, encouragingly. "Mr. Clape, pray know my friend, Mr. Meek; Mr. Meek, Mr. Clape."

Mr. Meek was delighted, but Clape was too much excited over his sister's triumph to give more than a hasty recognition in return.

He even became fitful and noisy, though in this he was not discordant, since the majority of the spectators were now up to the boiling point.

Madame Estrella was serene and self-contained; Miss Dudu flustered, disheveled and terror-stricken; the nasal professor as mad as a hornet, though struggling to be philosophic.

"These results are certainly remarkable!" he yelled out, sawing the air. "They never happened before. It may be that the prodigy is exhausted by her previous efforts; that—"

"More tests! Go on!" interrupted a dozen voices, amid the general uproar.

"—that the magnetic current is disconnected; or that—"

"No taffy, but more tests! What's the matter with Dudu?" And a fresh thunder of interrupting applause.

But the nasal showman was true grit, even in the throat of defeat.

"—or that the lady chances to possess the electrical wherewithal in even a superior degree to the prodigy's!" was the heroic completion of his explanation, after which he thrust his hands in his pockets, and perspired.

"Yes, yes; we should say so! More tests! Is the mountain wonder sick or tired?" And then the continuance of the mirthful hubbub, which was only quieted by a resumption of the tests, in compliance with the public demand.

But only one or two more were required to complete the discomfiture of the Alabama delegation, and the triumph of the contestant.

A final feat, in which a large benchful of ponderous investigators was sent whirling around the stage with a vim and facility that altogether discounted the professional's similar attempt, wound up the ridiculous but highly amusing affair.

Then there was a stormy demand for the name of the wonder-worker's conqueror.

"Let her proclaim it, if she dare!" suddenly burst forth a mocking voice, with clarion distinctness from somewhere in the brilliantly illuminated emptiness overhead. "Ha, ha, ha! She, too, is a miracle-monger—as much of a humbug as the cheap one she has exposed!"

CHAPTER X. WHIRLED AWAY.

THE spectators were astounded, but Madame Estrella was calmly facing them, with a majestically indulgent smile upon her queenly lips, and sufficiently clever to turn the mystification to her business advantage.

A wave of her jeweled hand commanded attention even at that critical break-up moment when the controlling motive is to crowd out of the building in the general hurry to get home.

"Some facetious ventriloquist is doubtless bent on making himself merry at my expense," she called out in her clear, melodious tones, "but I shall simply turn the tables on him as effectually as I have upon Miss Gumper, by frankly stating who and what I am. I am Madame di l'Estrella; my profession is that of clairvoyante, seeress and reader of the future; my rooms are at No. — East 127th street; in the words of the illustrious Barnum, 'First come, first served, you pays your money and you takes your choice.' My cards are on distribution at the doors on your way out."

There was something so sublime in the "cheek" of this cunning stroke of business that the masculine spectators cheered till they were hoarse, while the ladies laughed and looked interested, and the assemblage broke up in the best of good-humor.

Mr. Clape, however, looked honestly annoyed and mortified.

"I didn't think it of you," he grumbled, as madame came placidly floating up the aisle to rejoin him. "It was in beastly taste!" And he savagely crushed his hat on the back of his head.

But she did not hear, or paid no attention to him. Her impressive placidity was resumed, and she was looking over his shoulder at Evelyn with a gravity and sort of wonder in her superb, inscrutable eyes that gave no room for forwardness or offense.

A slight gesture to Clape was unmistakable, and, though the latter did not seem to relish it, the introduction took place forthwith.

She smiled seriously, extending her hand, which Evelyn took.

"Of course, your name is not wholly unfamiliar to me, sir," she said, in a singularly low and agreeable voice. "My brother often speaks of you. But—I wish I could have seen you, with my outward eyes I mean, before. Your face is a scroll, sir. You have a friend with you?"

Evelyn hastened to introduce his sanctimonious companion, at whom, however, she barely glanced, with the faintest of polite bows.

"We may meet again, Mr. Evelyn," said madame, with a really charming smile at parting. "It shall be your fault if we do not. *Au revoir!*"

Then she swept away, on her brother's arm, mingling with the procession passing up the aisle, the two friends purposely lingering to the last, in order to lose her in the crowd.

"What do you think of her now?" was the pseudo-divinity student's whispered query a moment later.

They were still in the auditorium, a good-natured jam at the doors having become intensified by a slow-motioned distributor of madame's professional cards, which were being forked out like so many patent-medicine circulars.

Evelyn did not answer at once. He was still disturbed with himself over the impression that the clairvoyante had produced upon him, almost in opposition to his will, and for which he could not account.

"I can only repeat," he answered at last, "what I said before—she is a remarkable woman—the most remarkable I ever saw!"

A slight flush came into the other's cheeks that was scarcely in keeping with the staid character she was assuming.

"And I," said she, with a troubled inflection in her voice, "can only repeat what I said before."

"What was that?"

"That she is a terrible woman—the most terrible I ever saw!"

"Oh, yes! so you said. Still, neither of us can know anything about the woman."

His companion's answer was so low that even he could not catch it.

"True," she murmured, "but one of us at least can feel about her."

In the dispersing throng on the sidewalk, where several cabmen were also clamoring for customers, they again drew back, for Clape and the clairvoyante had again come to a pause, while the latter, still to her brother's unmitigated disgust apparently, was growing interested in Newspaper Liz, the sham flower-girl, of whom she had just made a sweeping purchase.

"So you are a little orphan," they overheard the lady say, "without any home that can really be called a home?"

"Yes, ma'm," was the hypocritically plaintive reply. "An' I wouldn't keer so much, if I could only have warmer duds an' my grub reg'lar."

"And you think you would like to live with me, if I promise to be good to you?"

"Oh, Lordy, ma'm!" and the chit's eyes grew as big as saucers, while the impish face was so changed in its expression as to defy recognition on the bookkeeper's part, "wouldn't I, though?"

"I am glad of it, my dear, for I want a little girl who can make herself useful. And you can come along with me at once. Come!"

And Liz stole a sly glance around in search of her young mistress's approving eye, as she was borne off Harlem-ward in supposed triumph.

Evelyn's companion exchanged a gratified glance with him, as much as to say, "Wasn't I right as to the child's astuteness, when she has already established herself in the enemy's camp?"

He nodded his approbation, and was beginning to force a path through the still noisy throng, when the same unearthly voice that had astounded the entertainment-seekers rung out a fresh warning.

"Pickpockets!" it yelled. "Look out for your valuables! Light fingers are at work!"

What New Yorker does not know the effect of such a warning amid a miscellaneous and fairly well-to-do crowd?

Women looked frightened, there was not a man near there, including Evelyn, whose disengaged hand did not close over his watch-chain or his pocketbook. Men glared suspiciously at their chance elbowers, and, in the generally panicky feeling, poor fellows, like the *pseudo* Mr. Hezekiah Meek, for instance, with no valuables worth special protection, intuitively imbibed an impression of being under suspicion or crowded to the wall.

Waifa was not, however, of this submissive category, and even felt somewhat indignant as she found herself crushed back against a cab.

"Evelyn!" she cried, impatiently; "come, let us get out of this."

It was not vouchsafed her to know whether he heard or not, for at that instant the cab door seemed to give way behind her, an iron hand slipped over her mouth and nostrils, and she was noiselessly tumbled, neck and crop, into the vehicle.

"Help, Evelyn!" she managed to call out in a muffled way; "I am being kidnapped!" And then she was driven off down Broadway at a thundering pace.

Evelyn had caught the sound, without the meaning of the cry.

But it was Waifa's voice, and, turning without seeing her, the furiously started cab at once attracted his suspicious attention.

To suspect was now to act with him.

Springing into another cab, which chanced to be a hansom, he gave the word to the high-perched driver, with a promise of extra pay, and was at once dashing away in pursuit down the now all but deserted thoroughfare.

To return to Waifa: though the heavy hand remained pressed over her face, and she realized that her abductor was at her side, she had sufficient presence of mind to hold her breath as long as possible, lest the administering of an anæsthetic were being attempted, and to give over her struggling at the outset, the better to take the enemy off his guard.

A few moments served to show the wisdom of these tactics.

Perhaps the jolting pace they were being driven discommodated her captor, or he may have fancied that she had swooned.

At all events, he presently spoke, and, to her astonishment, the voice was other than that of her deadly life-pursuer, in whose embrace she would, indeed, have given herself up for lost.

"Come, now, young gentleman," said the voice. "If you aren't dead, say so, or make a sign to that effect. Rouse up, I tell yer. I ain't a dead-body-stealer, an' my orders said nuthin' 'bout runnin' off a corpse, nuther."

Joy, indeed! So the fellow was nothing more than a vulgar hireling, after all; though what would she not have given to pierce the secret of his employment?

She waited patiently till an uncommon jolt of the vehicle occurred. Then, with a swift, athletic exertion of every muscle and fiber of her well-knit frame, she tore herself from the ruffianly grasp, though without opening her lips, and the polished barrel of her revolver glistened in the uncertain light.

But the ruffian, though rather disconcerted by the silence than by the unexpectedness of the maneuver, was not thrown altogether off his guard.

"So that's your game, young gentleman?" he growled, with a sort of indifferent chuckle.

"Well, two kin play at it."

Then he also produced a revolver, and there was the novel situation of the pair of them, abductor and abducted, coolly and silently presenting deadly weapons to each others' heads in the interior of the rapidly-moving close carriage.

Waifa smiled, and the other chuckled again.

"I have no desire to kill you," said the former.

"An' I," observed the other, "ain't pertic'larly bent on murder nuther."

"But I am bent on having a good look at you," said Waifa.

She unceremoniously gripped his collar and pulled him forward, so that as much of the street lights that entered fitfully by the cabin windows fell upon him.

It was not an extremely villainous, though a very dirty and somewhat depraved countenance, that was thus revealed to her.

A middle-aged, bloated face, belonging to a powerful, thick-set body, poorly dressed in a threadbare overcoat, worn open now, to the partial revelation of a blue flannel suit, somewhat less threadbare, underneath.

"That will do," said Waifa, gravely, and the fellow grinned as he was released. "Whose hireling are you?"

"Don't yer wish yer knowed?"

"I see you won't answer that question, so here's another. Is this your first job in your present employer's service?"

"The fu'st one concernin' you, young gentleman. Let that content yer."

"You are determined to remain non-committal?"

"Dummer'n an oyster."

"Good, then. Order the driver to hold up, and let me out."

"Not much, young gentleman. The driver ain't inter this racket. It's me as is paid fur kerryin' you off—eggsactly what fur I danno. But, unless you holler fur the perlice, I'll stick to my job."

"Do you mean to say that the driver is unaware of my being in here with you?"

"I does, young gentleman. He's hired by the hour, with preliminary orders from me. I bundled you inter the box here so slick, no one else could have been the wiser."

"Ah, then the driver should be enlightened." And the *pseudo* Mr. Meek unceremoniously began to empty his revolver through the roof of the vehicle.

"Hold on! Don't do that!" cried the fellow, in sudden alarm. "Here, let me out fu'st, then! I mustn't be arrested! There's a hansom follerin' us full tilt, too! Hold on, I say!"

He had torn open the door, and was actually half-way out as he spoke, the driver having already begun to pull up, with a storm of terrified curses, but Waifa had fastened a firm clutch upon his waistcoat, as he was backing down, at the risk of breaking his neck.

"Not so fast, my man!" she exclaimed. "There's a key to a life-mystery I'm looking after, and I want you!"

"Off! I tell you."

But she dashed aside the menacing revolver, thrusting her own into his face, and held on.

At this instant, however, the cab came to a stop, with a tremendous jolt, and the fellow, tearing away with such violence as to leave a side of the waistcoat in her hand, dashed into a tunnel-like alleyway and disappeared.

As Waifa alighted, the pursuing hansom also came to a halt directly behind, and she was joined by Evelyn, who lost no time in rushing to her assistance.

"Question the driver!" panted the disguised young woman. "I think he is innocent of intentional wrongdoing, but something may be learned from him."

But the driver of the close cab, overhearing the words, and doubtless fearing to be mixed with some intrigue, suddenly lashed his horse afresh, and dashed away in the darkness.

"Let him go," said Evelyn. "I marked the cab's number—27—and it was one of the Black-and-Tan Company's. We can follow him up at our leisure."

He then also dismissed the hansom cabman, with a liberal *douceur*, and they were left alone in the gloomy thoroughfare, which proved to be Barclay street, in the neighborhood of Fulton Market.

Waifa was standing beneath a street lamp, inspecting the waistcoat fragment in her hand with intense interest.

"Look!" she exclaimed.

"What have you there?" cried Evelyn.

"A part of my would-be abductor's waistcoat."

"Well?"

"Look! It is the side containing the buttons. They are smooth gilt buttons. Don't you recognize the pattern and the cloth?"

"No—yes! Heavens! you don't mean to say—"

"Wait!"

She produced the button and adhering shred that had been found in the murdered Eliphalet Evelyn's death-clutch, and made the comparison.

It was perfect.

"Oh, why did I not suspect the truth?" she cried. "My late companion, the wearer of this waistcoat, must have been your father's assassin!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE TORCH OF THE UNSEEN.

EVELYN was no less astonished at this revelation than Waifa, but he did not look at it in exactly the same light.

"I do not agree with you," said he, after she had recounted her adventure in detail.

"What! is not here the proof?"

"Proof, perhaps, that the wearer of the waistcoat was my father's murderer—and consequently your secret enemy, likewise—yes; but not necessarily its last wearer."

"Be more explicit."

Evelyn was at this moment critically inspecting the articles.

"The comparison is perfect, I grant you. But see; the garment from which this piece was ripped is evidently new and of expensive material. Even the buttons have a newness in their gilt, to my mind."

"Well?"

"And you say that your late captor was otherwise miserably clad—somewhat trampish, in fact?"

"Yes."

"Ergo, the waistcoat may have been a recent gift, or perhaps purchase from some second-hand store."

"I begin to see."

"So that, not so much your vulgar last wearer, but more likely his intelligent employer, is likely to be our man?"

"Yes, yes; and the inference?"

"Is an exasperating one," said Evelyn, thoughtfully. "We have not only the enemy to deal with, but also, in spite of his seeming ubiquity and individual power, with his agents—his coarser tools—and they may be numerous and alert."

"I believe you," said Waifa, despondently, and she slowly put the telltale articles out of sight. "Oh, when thus hemmed in and beset, what shall we do?"

"Nothing further just now at least. Let us now be going. Fortunately to-night's adventure has attracted no public attention. I shall accompany you as far as your home. To-morrow night you meet the clairvoyante."

"Can I forget it?" murmured the work-girl detective, after a long pause, as they were crossing the City Hall Park to take the elevated road. "I dread it, too."

"Why?"

"She is a terrible woman."

"But a strangely fascinating one."

Waifa bit her lip, without replying. She knew the clairvoyante to be fascinating, but hated to hear him say so.

"Besides," continued Evelyn, "I shall not be far off when the interview takes place."

"Ah, you will be near?"

"Can you doubt it? Would I consent to your unsupported midnight meeting with this incomprehensible and perhaps, dangerous woman?"

His companion brightened up ("dangerous" sounded better than "fascinating") and a moment later they boarded a train.

It was now very late, and Evelyn insisted on accompanying his companion to her own door.

"Thanks, but you have inconvenienced yourself sufficiently," said Waifa, as, having quitted the cars, they turned into the Fifty-eighth street block in which her lodgings were situated. "Remember, I must slip in very cautiously, by reason of my disguise."

"No matter; I shall see you do so. After to-night's occurrence, I must see the very last of you."

There was a grave solicitude in his tone that was pleasant to hear.

But when they arrived directly opposite the dingy little Cavanaugh house, she turned and held out her hand in farewell.

"Wait!" he exclaimed, in sudden excitement; "look!"

He was pointing to the house, in whose lower windows a strange luridness had suddenly appeared.

Almost at the same instant, a volume of smoke and flame burst from them.

"Follow me not!" cried the girl. "Give the public alarm—I will attend to the interior!"

He hesitated about not following, but she had darted across the street and admitted herself into the burning house before he could prevent.

Then he gave the alarm, shouting "Fire!" at the top of his lungs, and a policeman, who chanced to respond quickly, lost no time in telegraphing the signal at a neighboring fire-box.

But the fire was extinguished almost as strangely as it had appeared.

"An odd sort of fire, that!" commented a chief of fire battalion, coming out of the house after the danger was a thing of the past, to the disappointment of divers pickpockets in the crowded street. "Never mind that hose-line. Fire's all out. Half-a-dozen hand grenades did the job. I can't altogether understand it, either." And he scratched his head while ordering his subordinates to give over their preparations.

Evelyn had recognized the speaker as a chance acquaintance.

"It was I who first saw the fire," said he, making his way to him through the crowd. "What was there odd about the fire?"

"Ah, is it you, Mr. Evelyn? Why, it was a fire that didn't burn much of anything."

"How?"

"Sure as you're born! Fifty dollars damage

to parlor curtains and carpet will cover the loss. Seems to have started from some strange sort of chemical, which did little more than burn itself up. There'll have to be an investigation. But that handsome young woman's presence of mind with the grenades did the business. There she is now, with the rest of 'em!"

Waifa, in her own proper garments, had just appeared at the door, together with Mr. and Mrs. Cavanaugh, for the purpose of reassuring the crowd that the danger was over.

"I live in the attic rooms, and had not retired when I smelt the smoke," said she, with a sly glance at Evelyn over the battalion chief's shoulder. "Then I remembered the hand grenades in the lower hall, and did the best I could, while giving the alarm."

"You're a brick, an' a rare pretty one at that!" commented the fireman, under his breath; and the crowd quickly dispersed.

At eleven o'clock the following night Evelyn called promptly to escort Miss Target to Harlem, she having made such explanation to her good landlady as reconciled the latter to the unseemliness of the hour for quitting the house.

"Sure, it's yourself that knows your own business best, an' I know the gentleman's to be thrusted with you, miss, wherever ye do be goin'," said the good woman. "After your brave conduct last night, it's not for the likes o' me or my good mon to be questionin' of you. But what can have become of the broth of a colleen as was with you?"

"What, Liz?" said Evelyn, affecting surprise.

"Yes, sir. She have disappeared like a whiff of tobacco smoke, an' it's not the sign of her Miss Target or meself have had since yester eve."

"Leave Liz to care for herself," said Waifa, smiling. "I have a notion she'll turn up all right again when least expected."

And then, with a parting good-night to the kindly dame, she hurried away with her companion.

Having rung Madame Estrella's door-bell, shortly before midnight, Waifa was admitted by a solemn-looking but comely mulatto girl, who merely bowed her head, and pointed toward a staircase at the rear of the well-lighted hallway.

Ascending this, Waifa was met at the top by Newspaper Liz, now duly installed, it would seem, in her new duties, who made no other sign of recognition than a curious dilatation of her roguish eyes, and then without a word she was ushered into the second floor front, where the clairvoyante, who was sitting alone, rose to greet her.

None of the customary accessories of the cheap fortune-teller's art was in sight.

There was a comfortable but commonplace air about the room, though it was separated by a rich *portiere* from a rear adjoining one, that might or might not be the abode of mysteries.

"You are Miss Target," said madame, setting herself anew in an easy-chair, after seeing her visitor seated. "But won't your companion weary of waiting out yonder at the street corner?"

"My companion! I am here unaccompanied, madame, in accordance with your conditions."

The seeress smiled. She wore a rich wrapper, which became her powerful, statuesque figure wonderfully, and her majestic beauty, though materially softened, was more impressive than on the preceding night.

"Do I not see that, as I see all else at my will? That you should have an escort hither is not strange. But he could have waited in one of the lower parlors. I was introduced to Mr. Evelyn last evening, and he was by no means disagreeable to me."

Waifa began to grow discontented, but she made no reply.

Nor had she reason to dread the feminine criticism of the clairvoyante's eyes, conscious as she was of her own maidenly charms, and of being becomingly attired.

In a moment, however, madame fell into a reverie, from which she was only aroused by her ormolu clock striking the midnight hour with a musical stroke.

"Come," said she, crossing the floor with the gliding step, and throwing back the *portiere*. "It is the hour."

Waifa silently obeyed, but paused in a species of wonder at the threshold of the inner room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLAIRVOYANTE.

It was superbly tapestried in scarlet and gold, which were also the characteristics of all the appointments and furniture, relieved here and there by ebony-wood finishings.

A small table, bearing a gorgeous reading-lamp, and flanked by two luxurious chairs, stood before a small grate fire; a massive canopied couch, standing in one corner, was hung with the same vivid combinations, which also predominated in the frescoes overhead; and in fact the entire effect was at the same time startling and pleasing.

"I'm fond of red and I'm fond of gold," said the seeress, when her visitor and she were seated

in this blazing boudoir. "The one is typical of blood, which is life; the other of money, which is happiness—if one has a sufficient abundance thereof."

Waifa with difficulty controlled a shudder, she knew not why. The woman's voice was velvety, her manner inviting, and there was nothing cynical or repellent in the philosophization just enunciated; and yet there was in it all, or about it all, a nameless *deadliness*—she could give it no other name—that was like the *felt* shadow of an unseen wing.

"Take off your hat and cloak, Miss Target—do! There must be an approximation to intimacy in our relations, or I can do nothing."

Waifa obeyed mechanically.

As the clairvoyante remained gazing at her intently, her aspect changed.

It was as though a beautiful mask had been slowly dissolved away, revealing the same features beneath, but infinitely refined, softened and spiritualized. The eyes also had grown dreamy and abstracted, and when she next spoke, it was in a far-away, murmurous voice, as of one who was sinking off out of the world, out of time and space.

"Waifa, you are very beautiful," said the voice. "But you are likewise very unhappy. Indeed, none could be unhappier. Even love, for you are at last in love, cannot but intensify the troublous and menacing evils that encompass you. I cannot yet see clearly. You must be nearer to, more *en rapport* with me, Waifa. Cross the separating gulf, and kiss me, child!"

Waifa struggled to resist, but a fascination, though mingled with the same sense of deadliness, was upon her that there was no gain-saying.

Tremblingly, mechanically, though shrinking in every fiber, she stepped across the slight intervening space, and pressed her lips to the clairvoyante's.

Then happened a remarkable thing.

The trance-kiss of those dreamful lips was like an arctic wind, and yet for an instant the woman's arms closed around her in an iron embrace, while out of some interior realm, but assuredly not from those impassive lips, rung a mysterious voice, clear and distinct to her alone, but otherwise felt to be soundless, or non-existent.

"Lost, lost, lost!" it murmured. "Child, you are in the embrace of Fate, which is infinitely more remorseless than Death itself. Lost, lost, lost!"

It ceased—that is, if it had really been—if it were aught more than the haunting cheat of her inner consciousness—and, as the clairvoyante's arms released her, she reeled back into her seat with a sort of gasp.

But the clairvoyante's eyes were now closed, her attitude rigid, her face colorless.

But her lips moved, and she spoke in the same far-away voice; which, however, seemed to have no relation to the mysterious dream-words that Waifa had last been conscious of.

"It is Evelyn whom you love. But beware! Fresh danger and disappointment await you there."

By a great effort, Waifa threw off the spell that was upon her.

"I did not come here to have my fortune told," said she, angrily. "If you cannot assist me in finding my missing treasure, as you promised, pray say so, and have done."

The only response was a fluttering of one of the clairvoyante's hands, as though beseeching the visitor to clasp it.

After some hesitation, Waifa placed her hand there, and the other's closed softly over it.

"Ah, now I see clearly. Yes; you are with me in my search, and all is well. What is this place? The Fort Lee Ferry. So, we have crossed the broad and swelling stream. Now, up, up, up, along the rocky roads! So, we are on top of the Palisades. Let us go on a mile or more. How wild and lonely it is up here. But we are nearing the missing treasure. Ha! mark this spot. It is to the right of the road, where an oddly-blasted tree, with a fish-hawk's nest in its withered top, springs from the very verge of the precipice. You cannot miss the spot, for no other trees are near it. And here, buried two feet down, at the root of this blasted tree, on a line with the cliff, is what you seek."

The trance-speaker was breathing hard, as if under some painful excitement, but she calmed again.

"Now dig, dig, if you would find. But there must be no delay beyond sunset of to-morrow. Otherwise, the treasure will be no longer here. He will have come and taken it. Ha! I see him now—the purloiner! the assassin!—but not just at this place. I see him indistinctly. He frightens me! It is your enemy—the secret, the invincible, the arch-tormentor of *your* life, Waifa! Heavens! Can human soul be thus incarnadined with crime, and yet be unassociated with the nether fiends? His face, his lineaments? Ah, could I but see them clearly, to describe, to warn! But no; the mist, the mist, the tantalizing mist!"

She paused, with slight convulsive quiverings, as though on the point of emerging from the trance.

"Oh, look but again!" cried Waifa, wrought

up to the pitch of curiosity now. "Do describe the haunting fiend! More depends upon it than you dream!"

"I cannot now. The conditions are not favorable. Release me—take away your hand. I am in pain."

"But what conditions would be more favorable? Speak!"

"The fiend's last victim's nearest friend *en rapport* with my scul—George Evelyn's hand-clasp, instead of yours. Quick—release me! There!"

And as Waifa took away her hand, the seeress came out of her trance.

She smiled faintly.

She was almost her self-possessed self again, but with a slightly dazed, giddy look.

"I can yet recall the second-sight revelation," said she. "The missing packet was located. I see that you are satisfied."

"With regard to that, yes, and thank you!" said Waifa, with more cordiality than she would have thought possible ten minutes before, and she began to put on her hat and cloak. "But if you could only have described the face of the murderer minutely!"

"What murderer? Oh, I recall it, though indistinctly. The face of the purloiner! Was he a murderer, too? Yes, yes; what am I thinking of? The old manufacturer met his death at the same time, did he not? Ha! that face—those awful, those crime-written lineaments! There again, but still vague, still indistinct!"

Waifa waited in a flutter of suspense. Perhaps it was not too late now for the murderer's description. But Madame Estrella remained inertly in her chair, pressing her hands to her temples in a bewildered way.

"Do try again!" said Waifa, eagerly. "You said Mr. Evelyn's presence would assist your power in this case."

Madame Estrella suddenly staggered to her feet, her eyes wildly fixed upon vacancy, supreme solicitude depicted in her face.

"Ha! the man Evelyn?" she gasped. "He is at this instant in deadly danger! Haste, fly, delay not! An assassin—an agent of the arch-one—creeps upon him under the cover of darkness! Warn him, or he is lost!"

The effect of these startling words upon Waifa was electrical.

From that chamber and from that building she fled aghast.

The lights had been put out in the halls, but she found her way out by an unerring instinct.

Once in the street, she fairly flew toward the corner—but a few steps distant—where she had left Evelyn in waiting, fear in her feet, terror on her lips.

At the very instant that her eyes found him, erect, alone, uninjured, she saw him attacked from behind by a crouching, leaping foe, knife in hand.

Then a shot rung out—from directly behind her, or perhaps overhead—a bullet whistled past her temple, severing one of her drooping hat plumes, and, as she rushed forward with a shriek, she saw him stagger and reel.

CHAPTER XIII.

WAIFA'S PERIL.

BUT, fortunately, neither bullet nor steel had found its billet in the noble form of Evelyn.

He had staggered and reeled, but only momentarily at the impact of a body suddenly falling against him.

It was the body of his intending assassin, shot dead by the dastard bullet intended for him. Evelyn, or for Waifa while hurrying to the rescue—who could tell for which?

"I saw it all, sir, though from a distance," said a policeman, who came up, panting, at this instant. "The shot came from back there, right over and behind the young lady's head, and this ruffian napped it accidentally just as he was rearing up to give you the knife from behind. Let me see." He stooped and examined the prostrate form. "Yes; he's stone dead. Sir, you had a narrow escape. Talk of providential interpositions, this beats anything on record!" And he forthwith began to rap for assistance to remove the dead body.

Waifa merely exchanged a glance with Evelyn, as much as to say:

"One more link in the murderous chain! Look at my hat-feather. That bullet was intended for me, and you, but for accident, would have been its chance victim, instead of that nameless ruffian at your feet. Do you not yet fear the fatality that invests me as a garment?"

"Where did the shot appear to come from?" was the only question she put to the policeman.

He could not say, but thought it might have come from one of the upper windows under which she was running at the time.

Evelyn and Waifa then maintained their own counsel, and started for the nearest elevated railway station, after accompanying the policemen with their ghastly burden to the station-house, where, besides answering a few questions, they had left their names with the sergeant in charge.

The dead body was that of a trampish, half-starved-looking ruffian, which was doubtless destined to remain nameless and unclaimed.

Evelyn was put in possession of what had taken place at the clairvoyante's, while he was accompanying Waifa to her home.

"Mystery upon mysteries!" was his sole comment. "Tell me one thing. Do you think that that shot was fired after you out of one of Madame Estrella's windows?"

"I can't think so," said the young girl. "She could hardly have crossed the floor, she was so exhausted from her trance-condition. Besides, unless her second-sight is genuine, how could she have known of your danger so opportunely? Moreover, would she have been likely to dispatch me on a saving errand for the purpose of shooting me in the back before the errand was accomplished?"

Evelyn shook his head.

"Incredible!" said he. "And from what you say, she does not wish either of us ill."

"No; or at least not you. Now tell me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Shall you visit Madame Estrella, in order to obtain the additional information promised?"

Evelyn hesitated.

"We must think that over, you and I, before deciding," said he. "In the mean time, we have to test the genuineness of her clairvoyance."

"Yes; to-morrow before sundown will do for that."

"That will answer; for to-morrow I shall have completed arrangements for putting the manufactory temporarily out of my hands."

"Do you think we can find the locality of the hidden packet as described by the woman?"

"I think it most likely. But will even the finding of the packet there prove her credibility?"

"Why should it not?"

"It might merely prove her prior knowledge—of her being in some way accessory to the theft, perhaps in secret league with my father's murderer—with the enemy."

Waifa seemed to catch at the idea with avidity.

"Oh, do you really think it?" she exclaimed, and then her countenance fell. "But it is impossible," she added. "Much as I fear and dislike the woman, I can imagine her as cunning and designing perhaps, but scarcely as criminal."

"But why should you either fear or dislike her?"

"I don't know. Good-night!"

They had reached her door and she held out her hand.

Evelyn pressed it, but felt that it was cold even through her glove.

Even before she could admit herself into the house, he came hurrying back after going a few steps.

"What is it now?" asked Waifa with cold surprise. "Have you forgotten anything?"

His manner was confused.

"Not exactly, but I—I— Oh!" with sudden passion; "how can I leave you, unguarded, here without fear and trembling for your safety?"

The hand which she once more gave him was no longer cold, but warm and grateful in its pressure.

"Fear not for me," said she gently. "I can defend myself, and besides—I am glad you came back to say this much. Good-night!"

It was with a lightened heart that Waifa felt her way up through the dark to her rooms after this.

But a surprise was yet in store for her.

As she entered her little sitting-room, which was dimly lighted by the remains of its grate-fire, a figure rose from the depths of her best easy-chair and approached her.

"Bless me! Can it be?" she exclaimed. "How you startled me! How could you have got here before me?"

It was Newspaper Liz, who now, with her roguish eyes dancing, threw her arms about her protector.

"Never mind how I came, ma'm!" she cried. "Ain't I game for anything? An', oh! how glad I am to see you again, ma'm!"

Waifa was no less pleased at the unexpected meeting, and the mystery of the child's presence was soon explained.

She had made her way into the apartments over the successive roofs, and by means of a window—as we have already seen would have been possible for a good climber—after slipping away from Madame Estrella's, unperceived, during Waifa's detention by reason of the street-corner tragedy.

"Does madame treat you well?" asked Waifa, when they had stirred up the fire and settled themselves before it.

"Bully!" was the response.

Waifa laughed.

"But won't you be missed?"

"No, ma'm; for the old woman thinks me abed—I don't sleep with Melinda, the darky, you understand, but in a room to myself—and I intend to be back before I am missed. You see, the old woman—"

Waifa laughed again, and then caught the diminutive *intriguante* in her arms.

"Why do you call her that?" she inter-

rupted. "Madame isn't old—thirty-five at the furthest."

"Ain't that old enough? Besides, there's something about her that reminds me of Methuselah."

"But then, she is beautiful."

"Lawzee! how kin you say it, ma'm?"

"But honestly, Liz, don't you think so?"

"Nary time," returned Liz, promptly. "Beautiful? Oh, Lord! But she's a holy terror, an' no mistake."

Waifa hugged and kissed her.

"Tell me how you get along with madame," she urged.

"But there ain't much to tell yet," answered Liz. "I ain't been there long enough. M'linda an' me an' the cook do all the work, an' madame says she's goin' to get me some new clothes an' make a lady of me."

"Then she suspects nothing?"

"Nixy! She's kind as she knows how, too—that is, when I don't make no mistake in rollin' her cigarettes for her."

"What! does she smoke cigarettes?"

"Like a chimney afire! I suppose she gave 'em a rest on your account, but it must have cost her a twist or two. Smoke cigarettes? Oh, Lordy! Don't I roll 'em all day for her, an' keep shovin' 'round the cuspidories, as she calls the spittoons, so's to keep 'em in focus?"

"Oh, Liz! Liz! what an impish, rascally little treasure you are!" And the hugging and kissing were repeated with interest. "But I am glad madame is kind to you."

"Yes; she's kind enough, only sometimes far-away-like, as if she was seein' spirits. Hardly ever cross is madame, unless when Clape comes home drunk."

"Bless me! does Mr. Clape do that?"

"Don't he, though? To be sure, I've only seen him drunk once, but it was a fairish sample."

"No wonder madame gets angry. Her own brother, too!"

"Brother?"

"Certainly. But isn't he so, Liz?"

Liz scratched her head.

"He may be in public," said she. "But otherwise, he's her drudge, her slave, her run-around—far more than either M'lindy or me—and oh! but ain't he afraid of her! Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth when madame's around."

"Liz, you are a charming little busybody!"

"I'll stick to you, anyway."

"I believe you. Now tell me why you slipped down to see me to-night."

"Because I couldn't keep away, for one thing. But then I *did* want to sleep near you just once more, ma'm; an' madame don't never show up, mornin's, before ten o'clock, so I run no risk. Then again, I wanted to warn you, ma'm."

"To warn me?"

"Against madame."

"Ah! but why?"

"I was in hidin' in the red-and-gold room."

"What! you saw and overheard?"

"Yes. Oh, wasn't it orful? I really don't see how you stood the ordereel, ma'm, without fain'tin' dead away."

"It was impressive and mysterious."

"Why, ma'm, it made my hair curl, an' I feel creepy yet! But you'd have been worse scared, if you could only have looked back."

"Scared at what?"

"At madame's face. After you had run away, I mean. She just flopped back into her cheer, an' looked that horrible an' venemous, I wondered she hadn't killed you dead while you was in her power. An' then them words that fell from her lips—sort of drip, drip, drip, like drippin' pizen! They was orful!"

"Are you sure? Speak! What were the words?"

"She loves him—him, whose glorious manhood has for the first time touched *my* heart! She loves him! Oh, why did I not slay and send her when I might? Them was the prezact words, ma'm."

Waifa was very pale.

"Are you sure?"

"What! an' you should have seen her face while she was a-mutterin' 'em. It was like a fiend-woman's!"

"Don't speak of it again. After that, I suppose, you managed to slip away and out of the house?"

"Yes, ma'm. I was right behind you an' Mr. Evelyn when they was carryin' the dead feller to the station-house. Then I skipped for the Elevated."

"Stay; where were you when the shot was fired that accidentally killed that man?"

"In the upper hall, gettin' ready to sneak out."

"Could that shot have been fired after me from madame's front room, or from any part of her house?"

"Bless yer! no, ma'm; I think not. It seems impossible!"

"That will do, Liz. I am glad you are here, and you shall sleep to-night in my arms. But you must wake in time to be back at madame's in good season."

"No fear of that, ma'm. I kin sleep or wake on occasion, as the cat said to the mouse."

Was Waifa as unguarded as Evelyn had feared?

It would seem so.

At all events, in the dead, bushed hour of blackness that precedes the dawn, one of the garret windows opened noiselessly, a stealthy figure entered, and was the next instant pausing beside the couch—faintly lighted by the glimmering embers of the fire—in which the beautiful girl, worn out with the excitements of the night, was softly slumbering, with the child folded protectingly in her arms.

A cloaked, ominous figure, the perfection of agile strength and grace; a figure whose face was masked, but whose basilisk eyes, alone visible therethrough, were as coals of fire, and whose right hand was closed upon the jeweled hilt of a dagger.

But the intruder only lingered a moment.

"Not yet—not now!" fell softly from those lips; and then the figure stole away as it had come—without a sound.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MODEL INDUSTRY.

THE next day, after the noonday lunch-hour, there was an unwonted stir in the great paper-box manufactory of Evelyn & Son, as the firm was still called.

George had just made a little speech to his numerous work-people, preparatory to their knocking off work for three days, incidental to the annual account of stock that was to be taken; and had also announced his purpose of being absent from business for an indefinite period, during which everything would be conducted by his faithful superintendent, Mr. Grubman, who had been duly provided with a power of attorney for the purpose.

All the operators were crowded into the long room adjoining the office, and whose tables were still covered with the remains of a satisfactory collation, which had been cheerfully provided at the young proprietor's expense, after a custom inaugurated by his lamented father.

These operators, young and old, male and female, had, somehow, a general independence, contentedness and interestedness of bearing, strongly contrasting with the main run of wage-workers similarly employed, and which would have excited pleasing comment anywhere.

Profit-sharing had done it. Each individual felt an interest and responsibility in the industry that would otherwise have been impossible. As a consequence, there was harder, better and more skillful work turned out than elsewhere, and the manufactured product of the Evelyn establishment had made its own standard in the exchange of supply and demand, such as others, on the old narrow and selfish system, might emulate in vain; and prosperity, good-will and contentment were the order, and not the exception, of the day.

Then Mr. Grubman, a worthy and well-liked disciplinarian, had also made an appropriate little speech, in accepting the new responsibility, which had been received with only less enthusiasm than that which had been evoked by the beloved young master himself.

Mr. Clape, the bookkeeper, had likewise essayed a few remarks appropriate to the occasion, but with only indifferent success. He was but little liked, for all his self-ingratiating ways, which were not a few; and, in addition to this, his jealousy of Grubman, as having been placed in the superior position, had been but flimsily masked.

But it was all over now, and George was busy enough shaking hands and exchanging compliments; while Waifa was holding a little farewell levee of her own among the women and girls at the other end of the long room.

"You needn't fear but that I may drop in on you from time to time," said George, genially. "I'm not about to run off to either Europe or Canada. Rest from business cares is all I am seeking, so that my furlough may be spent as much in the city here as elsewhere."

"Indeed, and you need it, sir!" said Grubman, heartily. "There's not one of us but has wondered, in the light of your great affliction, that you haven't taken a vacation long before this."

A stern and troubled look came upon the faces of all. "His great affliction!" Allusions to the tragic taking off of venerated Eliphalet Evelyn were not frequent there; but it had been their great affliction, scarcely less than his; and there was not a heart in that employ (with the possible exception of Clape's) in which the thought of the murderer yet remaining unidentified did not rankle like a personal wrong.

"I say, Mr. Clape!" called out George to the bookkeeper, who was returning to his desk, "don't forget the insurance policies. They all run out to-day at noon."

"I sha'n't forget, sir" was the reply. "Am going out now to make some collections, and will attend to everything together."

Here Miss Target came forward, followed by the women and young girls, many of whom were in tears.

"It is hard, sir, to say good-by to them," said she, her own eyes suspiciously moist. "I had no idea they liked me so much."

"We don't like you, miss," sobbed one of the girls. "We just love you!"

Evelyn was more affected than he liked to show.

"You have been a most efficient forewoman, Miss Target," said he, with studied politeness, "and we are all, naturally enough, sorry to lose you. It is your own choice, though; pray remember that."

"I do remember, sir—not that it is my choice, however, but my necessity," said Waifa, in a low voice. "Good-by, my dear friends; we part now, but we may meet again."

An hour or two later, when the manufacturing rooms had been deserted, Mr. Clape, who had returned from his errands to his desk, ventured to inquire of Miss Target, who was seated near the smaller desk occupied by Evelyn, if her interview with his "gifted" sister had been a satisfactory one.

There was nothing impertinent in the question, and Waifa vouchsafed to be complacent in her own way.

"I think I may say that it was not unsatisfactory," said she.

"Ah! but I thought that Delia's clairvoyance had stood you in good stead. Delia isn't often communicative to me, of course; but she as much as intimated that the hiding-place had been located in some unfrequented place."

"It is yet to be tested."

"Oh, yes; to be sure. I suppose you will lose no time in visiting the locality, miss?"

Miss Target smiled amusedly.

"Can you think it?" said she. "An odd expedition for a woman!"

"I should say so, miss!" interposed Evelyn. "I shall attend to that business for Miss Target, with perhaps some outside assistance."

Clape leaned over his books to hide an expression of keen disappointment, which was nevertheless unmistakable.

"Must you leave by the train you had fixed upon?" Evelyn presently inquired of the young woman.

"Yes, indeed!" said she, firmly, though only comprehending that the object of the question was to mislead Clape. "I could not think of missing it. And yet, if it discommodates you in the least, I beg that you will say so."

"Not a bit; I've made up my mind to see you on board, and I shall."

And in a few moments they quitted the office, leaving the bookkeeper devoured with curiosity as to what part of the world Miss Target might be setting out for, whereas the train so cleverly hinted of was in reality some one belonging to the Third Avenue Elevated Railroad.

"There they go!" he muttered, in a white rage. "What if this odd freak should set all our deep-laid plans to naught? I would give my head to know where she is off to!"

He ran to the window and peered anxiously down upon the crowded sidewalk. But those he would so gladly have spied upon had disappeared.

"Never mind!" he muttered, swallowing his disappointment. "Every dog may have his day; and, should George Evelyn wake up some morning to find himself penniless, I might have as good a chance in that quarter as he."

As for Evelyn and Waifa, they had not gone far when the former came to an abrupt pause.

"I wonder if Clape attended to the renewal of those policies," said he.

"Haden't you better go back and make sure," said Waifa, "while I wait for you at the station?"

"I sha'n't go back to the office," said George, after reflecting. "But if you go on in advance, and meet me by appointment, after you shall have made your disguise, it will expedite our affair."

"Certainly. Where shall we meet?"

"At the corner of Third avenue and 125th street."

She bowed her head, and they separated.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon.

An hour later the appointment had been kept, and Evelyn was crossing the Fort Lee Ferry, accompanied by a bronzed, handsome young man, whose dress and rolling, breezy gait alike betokened him to be a son of the sea.

But the sailor companion was, none the less, our friend, Waifa Target, in one more of her capital disguises.

CHAPTER XV.

TREASURE TROVE.

As any one familiar with the vicinity of Fort Lee and Weehawken must know, a long and tough climb up a rocky road is required, after reaching the New Jersey shore, before the broad, wind-swept plateau known as Weehawken Heights, and forming the first, or southern, table-crest of the celebrated Hudson River Palisades, can be reached.

The two friends came to a somewhat fatigued pause, after making the ascent late in the afternoon.

"Shall you," said Evelyn, mopping his brow, "be able to identify the spot described by the clairvoyante, do you think?"

"If the spot has any existence in reality, yes, without a doubt," replied his companion. "But see, it wants less than half an hour to sundown,

before which time, according to the seeress, we must locate and unearth the buried package, or it will be too late. We have no time to lose."

They pushed on over the wild, desolate road, which grew wilder and more desolate with every step after the rock-perched pleasure-pavilion had been left behind.

As they did so, the *pseudo*-sailor produced from under his overcoat a jointed spade, which he proceeded to put firmly together as he walked, and then carried jauntily over his shoulder.

"There's nothing like being prepared," he muttered.

George Evelyn laughed.

"True," said he. "But you don't seem to have much faith in the spade being brought to a test."

Then Waifa laughed, too.

"Oh, yes, I do," said she. "It is not the instrument, but the test itself that I have my doubts about."

"But is it likely that madame would have risked sending us on a useless search?"

"Not unless she is in league with the Enemy, and would mislead us into his hands."

"You think that possible?"

"I don't know what to think," said Waifa, after a pause. "But, after last night's tragedy, I am more suspicious of her now than ever."

Evelyn knitted his brows.

"As to the tragedy of last night," said he, "how fortunate it is that we have escaped publicity in the matter."

"But an officer called upon you this morning?"

"Only to say my murdered would-be murderer's body had remained unidentified, and was informed that my testimony alone would be sufficient at the inquest, so that you will escape even that much notoriety. The mention of our names in the newspapers was not prominent."

"True, and such is well for us."

"I acknowledge some interest, though, in the tramp's identity."

"That would aid us little, I fear. He was doubtless, like the wearer of the waistcoat—the fellow who sought to carry me off in the cab—some chance desperate tool of our arch-enemy."

"Still, identification might help us. I feel, naturally, a special interest in the identity of the poor brute whose knife was raised to stab me last night."

"And I in the bullet that killed him, after shearing my hat-feather."

"Yes; that was the more vital mystery."

There was another pause, after which Evelyn said:

"Might either of those fellows, think you, have been the same as he from whose uplifted dagger you so opportunely saved me just prior to our discovery of my poor father's murder?"

"I think not. No, no; that was our arch-enemy—rather my arch-enemy—in his proper person! I felt sure of it at the time, I feel sure of it now. There was no mistaking the absolute deadliness of those eyes, the serpent-like grace of that gliding form." She shuddered. "Never but once since have I seen their counterpart—or let me say their suggestion—in another."

"You?"

"Yes."

"In whom?"

"In the clairvoyante of Harlem."

"This can only be the fruit of your imagination," said Evelyn. "It savors of extravagance on the face of it."

"For the credit of her sex, I should hope so. But time will show."

"Let us trust that it may. By the way, what you have told me of Liz's visit to you is surprising. Did she manage to return to madame's without exciting suspicion, think you?"

"Trust her for that. She quitted me early enough to have done so, at all events."

There was abstraction in her voice, which caused Evelyn also to revert to the main thread.

"You then," said he, "identify, in your mind, the man who first attempted my life, my father's assassin, the original wearer of the mutilated waistcoat, and the enemy as one and the same person?"

"Yes."

"And those two others are merely his paid instruments?"

"Yes."

"And the ventriloquist as also identical with the enemy?"

"Yes."

"And furthermore, the Harlem clairvoyante as—?"

He paused, looking at her keenly.

"As a terrible woman!" replied the other, after reflection.

"Ah! but in some way closely connected with the enemy?"

"Yes."

"But no more than an accessory—a mere connection?"

"No more at present."

Evelyn drew a long breath.

"I like to hear you say that, my friend," said he. "I feared you might be extravagant."

"In what way?"

"In claiming the clairvoyante's identity with the enemy, also."

Waifa fell into a troubled reverie.

"That, if plausible, would make out the pursuing demon of my life as a woman, instead of a man—as a demoness, in lieu of a demon," said she, slowly.

"Yes; and what a preposterous idea!"

"I am not so sure of that."

"What! that a woman—"

"Wait, Evelyn. If my missing package is restored to me, as promised by the clairvoyante, I will show you its contents, and let you judge for yourself."

"I shall be grateful for the confidence. But the bare idea of a woman having murderously haunted you for a lifetime seems incredible now."

"Wait till you can judge better; though the idea, I confess, is a perfectly new one to me." Then, after a troubled pause, she asked abruptly, almost with asperity: "Why are you so anxious to defend the beautiful clairvoyante from imputation, even in the abstract?"

Evelyn was a little startled.

"I am not aware of any anxiety on the point, my dear friend," said he, temporizingly. "Might I not, with just as good grounds, accuse you of an anxious desire to suspect Madame Estrella without cause?"

"No, Evelyn, you might not. To vary the subject, how old do you take madame to be?"

"What a question! Well, somewhere about my own age—say between twenty-eight and thirty."

Waifa burst into a hard laugh.

"Even for a man—and perhaps a fascinated one—you astonish me! She will never see thirty-five again, and, like enough, not forty."

Evelyn felt a little nettled, but tried to compose himself.

"I am sure it is nothing to me if she is a century," said he. "And I don't take your meaning or drift in supposing me fascinated—that is, by any woman save yourself—a forbidden subject, through your own behest."

The work-girl detective's eyes were sparkling under the sailor's hat brim, and her color coming and going fitfully, in spite of her artificial tan.

Can even the best of actresses forget to be a woman?

"Shall you gratify madame's desire for an interview?" was the next question.

"How do I know yet? You forget that we have not fully consulted or decided upon that."

"We!"

"Certainly—you and I."

"Oh!"

And then she cast her eyes searchingly around.

They had come to a savage part of the plateau, where the road ran within a hundred yards or so of the cliff.

Not a dwelling or barn was in sight, nothing but miserable, unfenced pastures, interspersed with huge outcropping rocks and isolated clumps of ragged trees.

"The sun will be gone in less than fifteen minutes," said George. "Do you see any signs of our landmarks?"

"Not yet. And yet we seem to have gone far enough. But let us keep on a little further."

They did so, till Waifa presently came to a fresh halt with a gratified look.

"At last!" she exclaimed. "Here is the trance-depicted landscape to its smallest feature. There is the blasted tree on the brink of the precipice, with the fishhawk's nest in its top. Come!"

Evelyn shared her excitement.

In a few minutes they were under the tree. There was none other near it, so there could be no mistake. At this point the cliff made an almost unbroken sheer plunge to the edge of the majestic river, fully three hundred feet below.

"Now or never!" said George, flinging aside his overcoat.

His companion had already marked the spot. Evelyn seized the spade and began to dig with energy.

But much frost was yet in the ground. Progress was slow, and, but for the tempered edge of the spade, it would have been slower.

"Two feet down, I think you said?" gasped Evelyn, coming to a pause to wipe his brow when less than half the depth had been gained.

"Yes. Let me take the spade."

"Not yet." And he resumed the work, but more slowly, and with better method. "It is a little easier now."

"But the sun has more than half disappeared," said Waifa.

Evelyn again leaned on the spade, looking up to laugh.

"What of that?" said he. "If interrupted by the enemy now, how could we ask for a better battle-ground with him than up here on this open, breezy wold, with no chance of an ambush?"

"That is true," returned his companion, with equal confidence. "See! the sun trembles on the verge—he sinks—he is gone! and no interrupter as yet."

Evelyn was setting to work again, but at that instant the mysterious air-voice burst forth, apparently issuing out of the very bowels of the earth.

"Mocker! he is here!" it bellowed and shrieked. "But pity, at least for one of you, is now existent. Desist, ere it be too late! Desist! You have warning!"

But both Waifa and Evelyn were somewhat prepared for the voice, and they had by this time pretty thoroughly steeled themselves against its whilom terrifying effects.

"Our ventriloquial harlequin of ubiquity is on hand, as usual," Waifa managed to observe with some degree of composure.

"Trust him for that!" said Evelyn, without pausing from his task, after the first start of surprise. "And pray confess, my friend, that the voice, even with ghostly help, could hardly be thrown here from the home of clairvoyance in East One Hundred and Twenty-seventh street."

"Purblind fools!" reverberated the voice again, "will ye not, then, desist?"

"Not much, my beauty!" was the young man's irreverent response. "We're in this shaft for about all we are worth, and I rather think that we've struck oil. Listen, Waifa!"

She heard the stroke of the spade give forth a metallic sound.

"Take a last warning!" screamed the air-voice. "This time I would save, not destroy, you. Dig not, at all events, any lower than the box ye seek."

Waifa made an impatient gesture.

"Quick, Evelyn!" she exclaimed, bending eagerly over the now rapidly enlarging hole. "Hal! that clinking sound again. It must be the tin box inclosing my missing package. There! the clairvoyante keeps faith in this at least. Quick; hand it to me."

Evelyn had, in truth, by this time partly unearthed the looked-for box. A final effort, and then, raising from his stooping posture in the hole, he placed it in her hands.

Waifa gave a cry of pleasure.

She lost no time in opening the little box, and viewing the package it contained.

The package seemed to have been undisturbed.

"Wait," said Evelyn, who was still poking around in the bottom of the hole.

"What more have we to search for?" cried the girl.

"But there seems to be some other substance deeper down. Listen!"

He struck again with his spade. There was another clinking sound, but less hollow, and more like a solid body being struck.

A sudden terror came over Waifa.

"Dig no deeper!" she exclaimed. "Remember the warning!"

"So much the better reason for disregarding it!" and he kept on digging.

"Do come out of the hole, Evelyn! Perhaps that much of the warning was sincere."

"Nonsense! a bugaboo to affright children. There is evidently some other secret here worth having. Hark! another clink. Perhaps it is a pot of money." And he glanced up with a laugh. "One minute more. There! and now—"

Then the spade clinked again, but it was for the last time.

There was a tremendous explosion. Man and spade came shooting out of the hole in different directions, Waifa herself reeled back before a blinding flash and deafening report, and it seemed that the entire face of the cliff was up-torn.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TORPEDO'S WORK.

WHEN the work-girl detective recovered her senses, and the smoke and dust of the explosion had somewhat cleared away, a terrible scene presented itself.

A buried dynamite torpedo had been struck and discharged.

But the force of the concussion had fortunately been rather downward than otherwise.

As it was, a long narrow section of the cliff had been tumbled into the depths, and the tree, almost directly under which the eruption had occurred, was hanging prone down the new face of the precipice with its gnarled and gigantic roots thrust up above the ledge.

And was that limp, blackened and helpless figure hanging motionlessly there, like a burnt effigy, amid the trailing branches—could that be George Evelyn, the erst strong, brave, alert and self-confident Evelyn?

Yes; for Waifa could now see it writhing painfully, and yet a random movement might disengage it from amid the interlacing boughs, when the sheer plunge into the abyss would be inevitable.

Waifa realized that she herself had escaped unhurt, but supreme horror for an instant paralyzed her.

Then she was all activity.

"Wait! Courage!" she shrieked, springing up amid the overhanging roots like a squirrel. "Evelyn, my love, my life! I will reach, I will save you!"

To her joy, his voice answered, and, not in feeble, dying accents either, but in the nervous, hearty hail of a man with plenty of strong life remaining in him.

"Don't be imprudent!" it called out, warn-

ingly. "I am not so badly off as I probably seem. I am still stunned a little, and I feel that I am grimed and blackened, but that is all. Be careful of yourself now!"

Here she crept up over the roots, and caught sight of him again.

He was no longer limp and helpless, but had improved his position somewhat, though apparently unable to do so any further, and was looking up at her with a dauntless light glittering from under his grimy brows.

"Ah, you are alive!" she cried, clasping her hands. "God be praised!"

But a sheer descent of at least twenty feet separated them—she above on the roots, he below in the branches—and this seemed impassable.

"Let us be cool, and think," called out George.

"Are you not in pain?"

"In none whatever. The dynamite struck down and out, and there must also have been some giant powder, which would account for blackening. And you?"

"I am uninjured, thank God!"

"Ah, my darling! He is, after all, our sole dependence, chatter of Fate and Destiny as we may. Now let us think. It is evident that you cannot come down to me, any more than I can come up to you. Nor can I remain as I am for any considerable length of time, for the tree may begin to give way at any moment. Oh, if we only had a rope!"

She shook her head half-despairingly, but was evidently thinking with all her might.

Not a habitation had been passed during their last half-hour's passage along the cliff-road; that a rope was absolutely unprocurable was known to both.

Suddenly Waifa gave a frightened start; as her eyes met Evelyn's, she saw the same dreadful truth reflected there.

The tree had moved; inch by inch, the uprooted mass, roots, trunk and branches, was slipping down the precipice.

The maiden raised her eyes despairingly to Heaven. Then a thought seemed to strike her. A flush of crimson made itself apparent through the nut-brown coloring of her skin, but the brave, resolute sparkle was in her eyes once more.

"Stay right where you are!" she called out, imperatively, but yet with a world of hope and sweetness in her voice. "Don't move till I return."

She disappeared.

When she returned on top of the roots, it was with her sailor's suit partly disarranged, but a stout line, formed of twisted strips of red flannel knotted together, in her hands, and the excitement in her eyes augmented to a steadfast glow.

But the tree had slipped down more than a foot in the interval, which had naturally been one of intense suspense for Evelyn.

He was quick to perceive what she had been doing, however.

"You can't help me that way," he called out. "See; the tree is already sliding faster by reason of your added weight. Our united exertions would but accelerate the *chute*. Hasten round to the ground-edge of the cliff, and throw me the line from that quarter."

She obeyed him with a nimbleness that seemed little short of supernatural.

Evelyn's position was still so far down and out from the cliff that she had to weight the end of the line with a stone in order to swing it within his reach, but she at last succeeded; after which she tied the other end around her body, and braced herself partly behind a giant boulder cropping out at the edge.

"Swing yourself in!" she called out. "Quick—make yourself fast! The tree is slipping away!"

"Are you sure of your own strength?" was his reply, as he knotted the line about his own body.

"Yes; I am strong. Quick—lose no time! Now!"

He sprang lightly out of the branches, swinging in against the precipice, and thence making his way up steadily, hand-over-hand, she assisting.

He was saved!

But just as he crawled over the dizzy brink there was a roar, a plunging crash, and the tree disappeared into the abyss amid a shower of earth and stones.

Yes, saved, but in the nick of time, and out of the very jaws of destruction.

Girl and man—rescuer and rescued—shrunk back far from the perilous edge, and then for a moment, while mechanically disengaging themselves from the improvised life-line, confronted each other in a strange embarrassment.

The secret of that life-line was now plain to him. Waifa had possessed no scissors or pocket-knife by which she might have cut the stout blue material of her disguising overcoat into the strips necessary for a knotted rope. No; to procure the material by *tearing*, and which would yet be strong when twisted, she had been compelled to go beneath her disguise—her underwear had been her last and only resource.

As she saw he had guessed the truth, she mastered her painful blushes by a supreme effort,

and tried to return his gaze of respectful, idealized gratitude with an indifferent regard, though the bosoms of both were heaving tumultuously.

Were these two, thus reunited at the very doors of death, to conquer emotional nature once again, and resume the cold platonic tie that had thus far held them in leash?

No; human love and nature are not to be thus repressed forever.

A moment's pause—a pause like two companion waves, quivering ere they blend together—and then they rushed into each other's arms.

"George, my beloved!"

"Waifa, my angel, my life!"

That was all. The detective partnership might thenceforth be continued indefinitely, but they would continue it as lovers.

Each felt that it was fated to be so, and, hand-in-hand, they bowed to the inevitable.

"You still have the box?" queried George.

"Yes."

"Let us then set about our return. The twilight is fortunately thickening. An adjournment to the village barber-shop will enable me to clean up a bit before boarding the ferry-boat."

"Yes," said Waifa, "and you shall then accompany me to my home, where I will acquaint you with the contents of this box."

The late explosion had remained an inexplicable mystery to both. So much so, in fact, that they proceeded a considerable distance without referring to it, when George said:

"Have you any idea as to the meaning of the explosion, or of the strange warning—not menace, as heretofore, but positive warning—that preceded it?"

"None whatever, George," was the reply. "Have you any?"

"None."

So the dreadful subject was permitted to rest, at least for the time being.

It was Waifa who next broke the silence.

"George," said she, "I hope that you, upon your part, will next interview Madame Estrella, and at the earliest convenient moment."

"Is such your wish, Waifa?"

"My deliberate wish."

"But was not your wish far different a short time time?"

"It was."

"Why have you changed it?"

"Because I am no longer fearful of the beautiful clairvoyante—that is, on your account."

"You were so, then?"

"As if you hadn't guessed it! Yes."

"Why?"

"How should I know? I suppose I was jealous."

"Ah! but now?"

For answer she turned in the dusk and threw her arms about his neck. He pressed her to his heart.

Perfect love brings with it perfect trust. Torrents of protesting vows could not have established the halcyon calm of peace between those tried and loving souls more absolutely and indubitably than that embrace and kiss amid the gathering dusk.

After a delay at the village barber's, where a decided improvement was effected in Evelyn's appearance, they made all haste back to the city, but yet another unlooked-for interruption was in store for them.

While about to ascend to the elevated railroad station at the corner of 125th street and Third avenue, a business acquaintance of Evelyn's, who had but newly come up-town, hailed him with a concerned look that boded no good news.

"Bad fire down in your district, Evelyn!" said the new comer. "It was raging before I left the Franklin Square station. Your bookkeeper, Clape, has just heard of it, and gone down-town with a rush."

"Pray, be explicit," said Evelyn calmly. "Was my place on fire when you left the vicinity?"

"It was, my boy, and half the adjoining block. I'd sooner be kicked than have to tell you."

Evelyn merely bowed and jogged his companion's elbow.

A moment later they were speeding down-town, Waifa, who had overheard all, being the more disturbed of the two.

There was but one exchange of words between them before arriving at the scene of the fire.

"The insurances!" murmured the girl. "Pray Heaven Clape was not remiss in the matter of those renewals!"

"Let us wait and see," said Evelyn imperturbably. "The result will be a good test of his integrity, to say the least."

When they arrived upon the scene, the firemen had about subdued the flames, but only blackened walls and burned-out interiors marked the place where Evelyn's and several other prosperous establishments had been.

A group of down-hearted workmen, including Grubman and Clape, were standing near the ruins, and Evelyn approached them.

"It can't be helped, I suppose," said George. "Clape, of course you renewed those policies today, as I ordered."

The bookkeeper turned with a panic-stricken face.

"My God! sir, but I didn't," he exclaimed. "They're in my pocket now, but unrenewed. The whole matter escaped my memory."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONTENTS OF THE TIN BOX.

EVERY one knows the sort of general stare, half-pitying, half-curious, that is turned upon the man who is suddenly believed to be ruined.

Such was the regard that George Evelyn encountered now, but he did not wince, or even seem disturbed.

"So, Mr. Clape," he said, after a long pause, in which he studied the bookkeeper's pallid face searchingly, "you forgot about the renewals of those insurance policies, which expired at noon to-day, knowing that the failure to do so would, in the event of fire, leave me penniless?"

"Yes, sir. That is, I forgot the renewals, but oh, sir, as for the thought of leaving you uncovered—that is, ruined—"

A wan smile—a glassy smile, suspicious of exultance—shot over Clape's cadaverous face, but it was of brief duration.

"Oh, indeed!" continued Evelyn, contemptuously. "Well, sir, if your criminal forgetfulness was premeditated, as I strongly suspect, my vigilance was equal to the crisis, for I visited each of the insurance offices this afternoon, before going home, paid the premiums, and thus secured the renewals, even though the policies were reposing in your false custody."

Clape's face began to turn a sickly green now, and his disappointment was almost marked.

"Mr. Grubman, and you, my friends," Evelyn went on, addressing the rest of the group, "instead of being ruined, as you doubtless thought, the loss of our stock and machinery is fully covered by our insurances. We shall be ready to start again in less than a week. The cause of this fire, which has so nearly proved disastrous, will of course be investigated. If it should prove to have been of incendiary origin"—here he glanced meaningly at the now crestfallen bookkeeper, "some one may find himself in an even more uncomfortable position than at present. Mr. Clape, never more be servitor of mine!"

A cheer burst from the delighted group, and, as the miserable Clape slunk off amid the crowd, Evelyn, after addressing some cheering instructions to his superintendent, also found occasion to take himself off with his companion.

"I can understand your serenity under the first startling intelligence now," smilingly observed Waifa, a little later. "What could have prompted your fortunate after-thought with regard to the insurance?"

"A haunting distrust of Clape's integrity, I suppose," was the reply. "This complication may facilitate our affair somewhat. Don't you see how?"

"Yes. It will be your excuse to visit Clape, perhaps more than once, at his home, and may thus throw you into the interesting society of Madame Estrella, the gifted sister."

"Exactly. But you no longer allude to her as—that terrible woman."

The pseudo-sailor smiled contentedly.

"She is still that, and perhaps doubly so since to-day's occurrences," was the reply. "But I no longer fear her in exactly the same sense that I did."

An hour or two later, Waifa, in her own sweet character, admitted Evelyn to her little sitting room, and the revelations of the contents of the recovered package was the order of the evening.

But a fresh and bitter surprise was in store for them.

Waifa now for the first time opened the package, after taking it from the box.

She no sooner did so than she started back with an exclamation of dismay.

"It is gone!" she faltered.

"What is gone?"

"The letter—the principal paper. It was doubtless in my unknown mother's handwriting. It explained the meaning of the trinkets and clothing marks found with me at the time of my abandonment. Wormser always insisted that it might one day lead to my identification. Oh, it is lost!"

"Look more carefully."

But a further search was with no better result.

The remaining contents of the package—some written scraps, yellowed with age, and a few baby garments and trinkets—were there, but the important paper was missing.

"The murderous purloiner was sufficiently shrewd," said Waifa, hopelessly. "He was careful to abstract the chief jewel of the treasure before burying the casket."

"But let us not despair," said Evelyn, who was critically examining the articles before him. "All the initials and monograms found here are the same—L. F. Now you must have some recollection of the contents of the missing paper?"

"Why, I know them by heart."

"Then the mere absence of the writing is not important."

"Yes; for it was the only one in my mother's handwriting."

"I insist that that is not vital at present."

Besides it may be recovered. In the mean time, let us consider what is left to you. These little garments and these trinkets, as I said, are all marked L. F."

"Yes; standing doubtless for my Christain and family names."

"And these letters seem to have been a correspondence between a man and a woman?"

"They are so."

"The woman writer is, inferentially, a nurse, or some confidential person. She is importuned, sometimes by threats, sometimes by promised bribes, by the masculine writer (the handwriting is very masculine, at least), to murder a child placed in her care."

"I have studied that all out. I was the child. My mother must have stolen me from them, and then abandoned me at Wormser's door, as perhaps the only means of saving me from their machinations."

"Why, we are getting along fairly. And your secret pursuer is like enough identical with the writer of part of this correspondence"

"I have often thought so."

"Now to return to this correspondence. The woman, upon her part, seems to vacillate between her duty to her mistress and the temptations to obey her correspondent's demands."

"Yes."

"Her writing is poor, her phraseology evidently that of a foreigner."

"Yes."

"Her correspondent more than once addresses her as Justine."

"Yes; but Justine what? There is no address. The letters have no envelopes."

Evelyn was thinking intently.

"Now," said he, at last, "suppose you write a copy of the missing letter, to the best of your remembrance."

"I know it by heart," repeated Waifa. "I can render it word for word."

She brought forth her writing materials, and presently produced the desired copy, as follows:

"TO THE CHARITABLE ONES WHO SHALL FATHER AND MOTHER MY HELPLESS AND ABANDONED CHILD:—"

"Name the little one Waifa, because she is, indeed, a waif upon the sea of misfortune and calamity."

"The initials of her real name are L. F., as will be seen by the marks upon her clothing and trinkets."

"This real name she may never know. She is abandoned by her own mother to save her from death at the hands of her signal and ruthless enemy, between whom and the possessor of a princely fortune, her little life is interposed as the sole rightful heiress thereof."

"Keep this information a secret from all the world or her enemy may yet pursue her through the future."

"Justine, her nurse, heretofore faithful, has already been won over, and is no longer to be trusted."

"But in the event of Waifa being hereafter claimed by her miserable mother, the indelible birthmarks upon her little body shall be proofs positive as to her identity with L. F."

"A record of these marks, together with other proofs, is now in the hands of an old physician of this City of Boston, the wretched mother's only friend, but who is now also kept mute and inactive through considerations for the child's safety."

"In obscurity alone can such safety be vouchsafed now, for the enemy is as vigilant, as powerful, and must be forever restless and ill-at-ease while the child remains alive."

"Keep the little Waifa, and God will reward you, as He has already chastened and forgiven."

"HER UNKNOWN MOTHER."

"Is this all?" said Evelyn, after thoughtfully perusing the memorized copy. "Why, in what was the possession of the original letter of such vital importance?"

"By the reason of the handwriting," said Waifa. "It was as clear as copper-plate engraving, and yet so remarkable, so characteristic as to be literally inimitable. I should know it again instantly among any number of attempted imitations."

"Ah, there is a good deal in that. Was there but this one letter in that characteristic handwriting?"

"That was all. There were two others, one inclosing the money that came with me, the other inclosing this correspondence you have been studying, with the mention that the accompanying revelations were proofs of the conspiracy against the child. But the two other letters were not in my unknown mother's handwriting."

"Have you preserved those two?"

Waifa arose, went to one of her trunks, and returned with the writings demanded.

Their subject matter was unimportant, but Evelyn found their penmanship interesting.

"This handwriting is a professional one," said he. "It is perhaps that of the old physician mentioned in your mother's letter."

"Doubtless, though I never thought of it before," said Waifa. "But what good can it do to guess even rightly in such a vague case?"

"Much good, if it but pave the way to closer conjectures. Let me see. The Frenchwoman who disappeared so mysteriously from your Omaha home, what was her name?"

"Madame Alceste."

"Her given name, though?"

"I never knew it."

"Might it not have been Justine?"

Waifa started.

"Heavens! how should I know?" she exclaimed. "I never thought of that!"

"Easy enough to decide the point, most likely," suggested Evelyn. "There is her trunk."

He indicated the little old-fashioned trunk, not much larger than a portmanteau, which Waifa had once pointed out as being the property left behind by Madame Alceste.

"I have never examined its contents, though I have the key," said Waifa. "I have never felt that I had a right to."

Evelyn seized the trunk, and brought it out before the fire.

"Circumstances alter cases, my dear friend," said he. "I propose that we investigate Madame Alceste's literary and other remains."

Waifa colored, but with pleasure. She did not dislike the new tone of superior judgment that Evelyn was now unconsciously assuming from time to time.

When the trunk had been opened, an agreeable verification of their conjecture was obtained.

In addition to a number of articles of feminine wearing apparel, many letters were found, among which was the continuance of the correspondence on both sides with regard to the criminal disposition of the child.

But this was about all. The subject was continued in greater detail, and in some of her letters "Justine" (Madame Alceste) mentioned sums of money having been received, and seemed to have finally made up her mind to obey the behests of her masculine-seeming correspondent. But in none of the letters was the child or her family mentioned by name, or other than indirectly referred to; the letters themselves were devoid of addresses and signatures, besides being without dates; everything denoting the utmost guardedness on the part of the writers.

"Oh!" exclaimed Waifa, in despair; "if only one or two of the original envelopes had been preserved."

"Their absence is embarrassing, no doubt," said Evelyn, confidently. "But still we ought to be thankful for such information as we have gained. It is something to build on."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEWSPAPER LIZ.

"LET us see in detail," said Waifa, "just what we have gained."

"Good! I will commence at the beginning. In the first place, we have established Madame Alceste's identity with the faithless nurse."

"Granted."

"Next, her unknown correspondent's identity with the sleuth-bound pursuer of your life—doubtless then, as now, a person of wealth, power and far-reaching capacities for evil—perhaps the present possessor of the fortune and distinction that are yours by right."

"That is going pretty far, but—granted—"

"Next, her appearance in your foster-father's home, four years ago, as a fair evidence of secret remorse on her part; which might in time have developed into an effort to undo the wrong she had been instrumental in doing you, by forcing, through terror, your abandonment to obscurity by your unknown mother."

"Yes," assented Waifa, after a thoughtful pause.

"Next, her mysterious disappearance during the attack on the Omaha farm, as evidence that her demoniac master (your pursuer) then and there resumed control over her, probably forcing her to fly in his company."

"Yes; it seems logical."

"Now, to build a fabric on these slight theories, what have we to do, to conclusively discover your true name and place in the world, and at the same time track home this monster of your existence to his real personality?"

"Ah, what, indeed?"

"Why, two fresh discoveries seem to me as alone indispensable to that end, and, with God's help, Waifa, I think we can make them."

"And those are—?"

"The re-discovery of Justine Alceste, as I shall call her, and the identification of her correspondent's handwriting."

"Ah, but can we do these things?"

Evelyn took her hand, impressively.

"Waifa, my beloved, we can and shall! I feel it. Apart from the love-tie that binds us forevermore, my interests in this detective-quest are equal with yours. If you have a life-pursuer to render powerless, I have a father's murderer to bring to justice in the same inhuman fiend. I feel, I know we shall succeed!"

There was no tender passage between them now. Both seemed to have tacitly agreed that (unless on rarely exciting occasions like that upon the river precipice, when emotional surrender seemed in order), all endearments were to be relegated to the future when the Stygian stream of danger and incertitude should have been finally crossed. Their hands merely tightened in that significant and earnest pressure which is a sufficient seal of solemn compact.

"Heaven grant that your confidence is not misplaced, my beloved!" murmured the young girl, fervently. "One ray of hope would be invigorating at this solemn hour."

"I feel that it is not far off," said Evelyn. "Our quest is now in that deepest, darkest hour that but precedes the dawn of day."

As if in answer to his trustfulness, at this moment there was a light tap on the nearest window.

"It must be Newspaper Liz returned again!" exclaimed Waifa, starting up.

So it proved, the impish little thing springing lightly into the room as soon as the window could be raised.

"Hallo, little Jack-in-the-Box!" was Evelyn's greeting, "what are you here for?"

"For your sake this time, sir," said Liz, with her champion grin.

"For my sake?"

"Yes, sir; to fetch you a message."

"From whom?"

"From madame."

Evelyn and Waifa exchanged a look of astonishment.

"But how did you know I was to be found here?" demanded Evelyn.

"Madame knowed. Reckon she clairvoyant-ed you."

"Oho! then your secret is surrendered? She knows of your acquaintance with us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you come to us over the roofs, instead of by the street door, like a civilized being?"

Liz assumed a mysterious air.

"Force of habit, sir, or mebbe it's 'cause I ain't civerlized. But then ag'in, why should them Cavanaugh's know anything of our secrets?"

Evelyn laughed.

"Why, indeed?" said he. "But how did madame know of your connection with us?"

"I told her."

"What for?"

"Because Clape is on the skip."

"Where is he skipping to?"

"To Canada."

"Oho!" and then Evelyn leaned back in his chair, and indulged in a hearty laugh. "Is it possible?"

"Don't they all skip there when they're crooked?" said Liz, with a business-like look.

"Perhaps so. So Clape is crooked, eh? I'm not surprised to hear it."

"I'll tell you the whole story, sir."

"Well, suppose you do."

"I overheard madame and Clape havin' a reg'lar quarrel. None of your little one-horse spats, you understand, but a reg'lar out-an'-out, rip-roarin' old snorter. Understand?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Even Merlindy, the mulatta gal, couldn't help takin' notice, though pretty busy with ma'mzelle at the time. 'Madame's on her war-hoss, shub, honey!' says she. 'She'll jess skin that Clape alive.' 'Let her skin,' says I. Then I overheard madame sing out: 'Sir, you are both a coward and a scoundrel! If your employer suspects you of willful neglect with regard to the insurances, and you're innocent, it is your duty to see it out like a man.' 'But that ain't the worst of it,' said Clape's voice, kinder shakey-like. 'I tell you—here he was inordinable. 'What! you confess to me that you're a thief? holler! madame; 'to me, your own half-sister, what brung you up from nothin'? Clape said something more, but shakier an' inordinable than before. 'What! 'screches madame ag'in; 'an' you'd now light out for Canada, like the rest of 'em, an' be a exile?' she says. 'But it shall never be, sir. I'll inform on you, I'll give you up to the good man you confess to have swindled first!' Then Clape was ordible enough. 'The thunder you will?' says he. 'Well, I reckon I won't give you a chance.' An' I just had time to save my bacon by slippin' to one side, as he rushed out of the door, makin' a break for his bedroom in order to pack up for Canada."

The little narrator made a conventional pause in her harrowing tale, to observe its effect upon her hearers, which was sufficiently marked.

"The next I overheard," she went on, contentedly, "was madame ragin' up an' down that room like a royal ringboned tagger in his cage. 'Oho!' she snorts; 'if I only had a trusty messenger, how quickly would I warn Mr. Evelyn of this scoundrel's intended flight!' This was too much for me. 'I'm your man!' says I, hoppin' in on her like a cyclone. 'I know Mr. Evelyn like a book,' says I, 'for I worked in his shop once afore you took me up.' 'So, you were listenin'—you was eavesdroppin'?' says she, takin' me by the left ear. 'Yes, ma'm, I was,' says I, as bold as a lion. 'For who could help it,' says I, 'with the whisperin's so ordible. But I'm your man, any way,' says I 'to save Mr. Evelyn in this karisis, for he was a true an' good master to me,' says I."

Here both Waifa and Evelyn burst into a laugh.

"Oh, but it's no taffy I'm givin' you, as you shall see!" continued Liz, elevating her eyebrows. "Don't interrupt again, please. I'm that pertick'lar about interruptings when in the middle of a good story that I've knowed 'em to shet me up like a mousetrap for six hours on a stretch."

Her hearers now manifested the utmost gravity, and Liz resumed:

"Well, madame sort of dropped my ear, an'

fell into a substracted mood and gesture. 'You should have told me this before,' says she. 'So you're really acquainted with Mr. Evelyn?' 'Like a twin-sister,' says I, not wishin' to put it too strong. 'An' Miss Target, his forewoman,' says she, 'do you know her, too?' 'Better'n my prayers,' says I. 'Wait!' says she, an' she flops into the fu'st chair handy, with her hand to her scalp-lock, an' her eyes growin' so substracted an' stony that I was half-skeered into revulsions. 'She's got 'em, sure pop!' thinks I to myself. But purty soon she comes out of 'em, lookin' sort of bazy, but otherways as mad as a Dutch hornet, an' with her eyes snappin' like hot chestnuts. 'I've seen him,' says she. 'He's conversin' with Miss Target in her room over a trunkful of letters an' old clothes, though I couldn't exactly catch their words.'"

"Did she really say that?" interrupted Evelyn, while Waifa was no less surprised.

"Her very same identical words, Mr. Evelyn, caught on the fly, or I wish I may drop stone dead sixty times a minute!" And Liz also gave a wondering look at the open trunk and its contents.

"Go on."

"That's jest what madame next said. 'Go on to Mr. Evelyn this very minute,' says she, 'an' repeat to him everything you overheard between my brother an' me. Wait,' says she, 'he mayn't believe you. Take this to him.' Then she scribbled with her left hand on the back of this card, gave it to me, an' I skipped for the Elevated like a streak; for she also tipped me a quarter, sayin' as she thought me a real smart little girl, an' only hoped I wasn't born to be hanged afore reachin' maturity."

Here Liz produced the card, adding in a wonder-stricken tone: "'Twas with her left hand she writ it, sir, think of that; an' jest as slick as oil, too, though she's mostly as honest right-handed as the best of us!"

It was Madame Estrella's professional card, and on the back of it was penciled, in an almost illegible scrawl, the following:

"My brother, whom I indignantly disown from this time forth, confesses to have systematically embezzled your funds, and is about to fly for the border. You can intercept him by prompt measures, should you care to take them. *Apropos* of more important matters, it may be to your advantage to see me soon. I know the outcome of your adventure on the Weehawken cliffs. With my second-sight I saw it all, but was powerless to warn or caution. But thank Heaven, you escaped. If possible come to me for information to-morrow midnight, alone."

"MADAME ESTRELLA."

"What shall you do?" asked Waifa, after Evelyn had passed the card for her perusal.

"Nothing. I can guess the amount of the rascal's embezzlement, and it isn't large. Let him run. Good riddance, too!"

"I knew you would say that. But about the rest."

"Oh, about visiting the clairvoyante? I shall go, if you advise it."

"I do advise it. The woman's second-sight is apparently genuine. Something may come of it."

At that moment the air-voice burst upon them unexpectedly.

"Scheming fools!" it cried; "would ye hope to circumvent me with your clairvoyantes and your shallow plottings? Ha, ha, ha! Ye do but fight with Fate!"

Beyond a slight start, neither Waifa nor Evelyn paid any heed, but the little girl was painfully terrified.

Indeed, it was some time before they succeeded in restoring her naturally fearless hardihood.

"Come, now, Liz!" said Waifa at last, in a rallying way; "do you mean to say that this is the first time that you have heard that ghostly voice?"

"The very fu'st ma'm!" was the reply, with genuine earnestness; "an' the good Lord knows I hope it's the last!"

A growing confidence in Madame Estrella's good faith was thus established; for it seemed to stand to reason, in the light of Liz having quitted her presence so recently, that the clairvoyante could have no connection with the ventriloquism, which had theretofore seemed just possible.

Suddenly it occurred to Waifa to question Liz on a certain feature in her report.

"Who is the ma'mselle you spoke of as requiring the colored girl's special services?" she asked.

Liz looked preternaturally mysterious.

"She's the loony woman in the cellar," she replied.

"In the cellar—in madame's cellar?"

Liz nodded.

"Who and what is she?"

"Only madame an' Merlindy know."

"But when did you first learn of such a person?"

"To-day."

"What is her name?"

"Ma'mselle."

"But hasn't she a more distinctive name than that?"

"Only one that I chanced to hear on the sly; an' that was only a fu'st name."

"What is it?"

The answer caused both Waifa and Evelyn a shock of surprise.

This was the answer:

"JUSTINE!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WAIFA'S LIGHTNING-CHANGE ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

OF course, there was more than a mere chance that the mysterious "Ma'mselle," or "Justine," confined at Madame Estrella's house, was some other woman than the Justine, or Madame Alceste, whose discovery had now become of such paramount importance.

But still it was upon the inference that she was one and the same that our friends could alone continue their researches; and, until dissipated, it had to be carefully followed up as the only clew of any description whatever, that had as yet offered itself, to the identity of Waifa's demoniac pursuer and the murderer of Eliphalet Evelyn.

But on the assumption that this inference was correct, how intimate must be the clairvoyante's relations with the arch-villain, what new element of danger was added to her personality, and of what depths of hypocrisy must she be capable.

Still, it was resolved to follow up the clew unswervingly.

Newspaper Liz was dismissed, with the parting injunction to keep her eyes and ears distended yet more widely to the goings on in the clairvoyante's house.

She also carried back to the latter a brief, but profoundly respectful note, to the effect that Clape's fugitive designs would not be interfered with, at least for the time being, and that Evelyn accepted the appointment for the following midnight with gratitude and pleasure.

Then, before separating for the night, Waifa and Evelyn briefly considered the gravity of the new aspect of affairs.

"I feel fearful now about consenting to your keeping the appointment with madame," said Waifa. "But in any event, I intend to be within reach, just as you were on the occasion of my interview with her."

"That might be well," said Evelyn, thoughtfully. "But would it be appropriate for a young woman to loiter in waiting at a lonely street corner in the dead hour of midnight?"

"You forget my talent for disguises."

He had forgotten it for the moment, and the reminder of it was not altogether agreeable.

He looked at her adoringly.

She was becomingly attired in a gown of some dark, soft material, which displayed her tall, ravishing figure to the best advantage. Her abundant hair was charmingly arranged, her sweet, melancholy eyes had received an added luster, her beautiful face, usually so pale, was faintly, delicately flushed, and, more than ever, her every attitude and motion seemed instinct with their melodious grace.

His love for her was deeper than he could say. The thought of her ever again assuming a masculine character—and as yet she had assumed no other disguise—was becoming little short of repugnant to him.

With the quickness of love's intuition, she interpreted his thought.

The sea-shell coloring of her face deepened to crimson, and her eyes drooped, but she was not wholly abashed.

"Remember the necessity of it," she murmured. "Bear in mind, too, that for a long period I looked, lived and acted as a man in St. Louis, without the deceit being suspected."

"How in the world," he exclaimed, "did you know what I was thinking of?"

How had she known! She raised her glorious eyes to his, with a sort of reproach in their loveliness that he failed not to understand, and with a glad-beating heart.

"How did I know?" was the language of that eloquent glance. "How does the dew-pearled blossom know the meaning of the beloved sunbeam which is at once its inspiration and its life?"

"Wait!" said she, playfully waving him back as he impulsively extended his arms to clasp her to his heart.

She abruptly disappeared into a small adjoining room, closing the door after her.

Soon, incredibly soon, it seemed to Evelyn, the door opened, and there stepped forth for his inspection an old apple-woman, made up to the life, with basket on arm, mob-cap, white apron, and sturdy though generally aged aspect, in which he found the utmost difficulty in realizing that it was Waifa, his beloved darling, impersonating the part.

"Buy any apples?" cried the character, in a sharp, croaking voice, while temptingly holding out a couple of red-cheeked samples with a trembling hand. "Oh, do, now, mister! It's past midnight, an' I must sell out afore goin' home, you know. No, I ain't afeard. Not much. Yes, there's lots of roughs a-roamin' the streets, but they all know old Apple Sally, an' she's too old to come to harm. Only a nickel for two! Do buy a couple, mister."

He looked at her in wonder.

"Now," said Waifa, in her natural voice,

"just cast your eyes away from me, and don't look again till I give the word."

He obeyed.

"Please, sir, give me a penny!" presently whined an altogether different voice. "It's shtarvin' at home that me mother an' six colleens are this blissed minute, an' I'm not wan av thim Eytalian paupers what takes the wur-rk an' the bread out av the poor Irishman's hands an' mouth, bad 'cess to 'em!"

Evelyn looked up, and then could not abstain from an exclamation of increased surprise.

Waifa had not stirred from the spot, and less than twenty seconds had elapsed, but what a transformation!

The apple-woman had vanished, and in her place stood a tattered beggar-maid, in whom the charms would have seemed repeated that won of old the royal regards of King Cophetua himself. Save, perhaps, for the roguish twinkle in the Irish eyes, and the hard lines of seeming privation in the appealing face.

The huge market-basket, standing near—and evidently the source of the costume-change that had been so summarily effected—was the sole reminder of the character which had made way for the one now existent.

"Capital!" exclaimed George. "I can scarcely realize it."

Waifa laughed from under her disguise, and yet in keeping therewith.

"Turn your eyes away once more," said she.

He did so, but had hardly turned the marvel of these transformations well over in his mind before another voice, this time crying with business-like obsequiousness, "Hi, there, boss! shine 'em up? only five cents!" caused him to encounter a yet more remarkable substitution.

The beggar-girl had dissolved into an Italian bootblack of sturdy proportions, willing outfit, coarse, but warm garb, and characteristic black hair, black eyes, and walnut-hued complexion, who seemed well on his way to a fruit-stand proprietorship, if there was anything in self-denying industry and hard work.

"It is needless for me to applaud," said Evelyn, laughing. "Instead of playing the detective in St. Louis, my dear Waifa, you should have gravitated to the stage as steel to its magnet. As a lightning-change artist you would assuredly have been without a peer."

Waifa's own musical laugh rung out once more, and, snatching up the basket, she again disappeared into the adjoining room, whence she quickly reappeared in her own charming personality.

"Confess," said she, "that my make-ups are not limited to dandies, divinity students, young sailors, or, indeed to the assumption of but one character per day."

"I confess to all that," said Evelyn, heartily. "It is the thought of your ever having to disguise yourself at all that is painful to me. Heaven grant the swift coming of a time of safety and happiness, when the necessity of all such unsexing masquerading shall have passed away forever."

"Do you think that I do not echo that hope from the bottom of my heart?" and the beautiful girl tip-toed to give him a chaste little kiss. "Good-night, now, my own love. We are both greatly exhausted from the exciting and perilous scenes we have encountered, and the next twenty-four hours may be honestly spent in recuperative rest."

He drew her to his breast in a fervent embrace, and they parted.

It was now late at night.

As Evelyn was hurrying along Fifty-eight street, a gloomy locality at this hour, toward the nearest Elevated station, a rough-looking man stepped forth under a street lamp, and respectfully accosted him.

"Excuse me, sir," said the man, "but are you the gent what was with the young preacher chap t'other night as was bundled off by a ruffian into a close cab?"

Evelyn was greatly surprised, but his surprise was as nothing to what was in store for him.

"I am the person," said he, eying the fellow, sternly. "Who are you?"

"I sir," was the cool response, "am the ruffian what bundled off the young chap."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because we may be of some use to each other."

"In what way?"

"By something of an exchange, boss."

"Explain."

"The young chap I tried to kidnap is your friend, I take it?"

"He is."

"Well, I propose, boss, to give you a clew to my employer in the job."

"And in exchange what would you ask?"

"Help to revenge me for the murder of my brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes, the man who was shot by mistake on the street corner near the clairvoyante's house."

"Was that man your brother?"

"Yes."

"But he would have assassinated me."

"Ah! if he had only succeeded, this here mis-

erable compleraction would not have risen up."

Evelyn eyed the fellow keenly, as if to assure himself of his sanity. But though the man was ragged, dirty, passably evil-looking, and perhaps hungry—like enough a fairish sort of hireling bravo on occasion—his glance was settled, his manner composed.

"Will you make yourself comprehensible?" said Evelyn, sternly. "Or must I hand you over to the police?"

The tramp grew uneasy.

"Oh, come now, you wouldn't do that, sir?" he half-whined.

"Wouldn't I? Trifle with me a little longer, and find out."

"But I don't mean to trifle with you, sir," said the man, earnestly. "Here's my story in a nutshell. The man who would have killed you, and was killed by his employer's bullet instead, was my brother. Our hirer was the same man. I failed in the kidnapping job, an' got no reward. But if Enoch—that was my brother's name—had only succeeded in what he was hired for, which was for stabbing you in the back, he would have got such a swag from the Deep 'Un as would have kept the pair of us in clover for half a year. But Enoch failed, too, besides losin' his life"—there was the sound like the parenthetic gritting of teeth—"an' hence the compleraction alluded to by me. Understand?"

"And you would now revenge yourself, for the random shot that cut short your worthy brother's intended assassination of myself, by giving me a clew to the infamous employer who hired you both? Is that about the size of it?"

"Exactly."

"What is your name?"

"Job Mixer, for want of a better."

"Well, step a little closer, Job, and let me have a better look at you." Taking him by the collar, Evelyn drew him closer under the lamp, and scrutinized the hairy, ill-favored face with becoming severity. "You will excuse me, I hope, for regarding you as a somewhat unique specimen of the animal kingdom, but I really can't help it."

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEEP ONE.

JOB MIXER, as we shall call him, endured the inspection with stolidity, but not without a sort of protest.

"If your object, boss," said he, "is to make game of me, jest say so, an' you an' I will part."

"Easier said than done," said Evelyn, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and eying him sternly. "I have no wish of making game of you. But should you try to give me the slip now, without a fuller explanation than you have yet made, I should feel it my duty to have you arrested on the spot."

"Arrest, and be blamed!"

"You have changed your tone."

"I have reason to. The mikerscopic examination wasn't all on one side, boss. You can't afford to let me slide, puzzlin' as you find me."

"One more question first."

"Fire it off, an' welcome."

"You wear another waistcoat than you wore when attempting to kidnap my young friend."

"I should say so. The little parson spoiled the gold-buttoned one for me."

"True; but it had been disfigured before that."

"Yes; by the loss of a button and a tuft of the blue stuff. That was why it was guv to me, I reckon."

"Who gave it to you?"

"My employer—that is, he was my employer afore he went back on me."

"Now we are getting to business. This man who employed you—who and what is he?"

"The Deep 'Un."

"Don't you know any name he goes by?"

"No; an' no more did Enoch. He—he's a mystery."

"But you have seen him—conversed with him?"

"Yes, after a fashion, an' got money from him, too."

"Describe him."

"Stealthy as a snake, graceful as a leopard, strong as a lion."

"But his face?"

"I never saw it."

"What?"

"Never, I tell you. On the few occasions I've met him, he has either worn a mask, a big cloak and slouched hat, or in some way managed to keep his face out of view."

"Always thus?"

"Yes; once only, when I thought I had him dead to rights up at his Hermitage, as he calls it, I came near to surprising him with his face uncovered, but that was all. That was some time ago, though."

"How long ago?"

"Just before the murder of the old paper-box manufacturer."

Evelyn started.

"Do you think your former master the author of that foul deed?"

"I feel sure of it—as sure as I am that you are George Evelyn, the son of the murdered man."

"How have you known me as such?"

"By a description furnished by the Deep 'Un, that I might identify your companion—the pious-lookin' young chap I was to be paid for kidnappin'."

Evelyn was filled with new concern for Waifa. Of what avail her numerous disguises, her protean talent for impersonating various characters, if her arch-enemy could thus readily pierce them all.

"Where were you to have carried the young man to," he went on, "in the event of your kidnapping plan proving successful?"

"To a boat on the North River, by which, perhaps, he was to find his way (or have it found for him) to the Hermitage."

"Is this Hermitage the Deep One's country retreat?"

"Yes."

"Where is it located?"

"In the heart of Whippoorwill."

"Whippoorwill! What and where is that?"

"A secluded hill region, overlooking Wampus Pond, in the wildest and savagiest recesses of Westchester county, New York, about equidistant—say ten miles—from White Plains, Tarrytown and Sing Sing."

"Thanks; you are explicit."

"I ought to be. When there, my foot is on my native heath, as some one says in a play."

"What do you propose?"

"You are rich and intelligent. I am penniless and ignorant, to say nothing of my villainy. I propose that you let me help you to the capture of the Deep 'Un, paying me, meantime, for my services."

Evelyn smiled.

"Revenge is not, then, a master-incentive with you?"

"It would be, if I were not penniless, homeless and hungry."

The man looked it.

"Well, what is your plan?"

"It is this. I can find out to-night when the Deep 'Un is apt to be next at his Hermitage. That is the only place where you can hope to entrap him. I will bring you the information to-morrow at any place that you may appoint."

It was a strange encounter, a yet stranger proposition.

Evelyn reflected, turning the matter over in his mind, and considering its varied aspects.

"A final question," said he, slowly. "Is the Deep One, so far as you know, an accomplished ventriloquist?"

"I do know that he is—I found it out by accident. His voice-throwing power is simply amazin'."

"All right, Job Mixer. I shall make the appointment with you. Here is my card and residence address. I shall expect you to-morrow evening at eight o'clock. Good-night."

"Hold on, boss."

As Evelyn turned again, Mr. Job Mixer was still standing blankly under the street-lamp, with the card between his fingers.

"Well, what more?"

"Mebbe it escaped you, sir, what I made bold to observe about bein' bu'sted and hungry?"

"Pardon me; I forgot."

Evelyn poured a handful of silver into the outstretched paw, and hurried away.

He had thought something of returning instantly to Waifa with a report of this new strange happening, but desisted on reflecting that she, like himself, must be sadly in need of repose and rest.

Half-an-hour thereafter he was at home in bed, buried in the profound slumber that is the consequence of extreme mental and physical exhaustion.

As for Mr. Job Mixer, he neither hastened to relieve either his professed hunger or homelessness.

He made a bee-line for Harlem, slunk off into dreary East 127th street, and then faded like an evil shadow into the basement region of Madame Estrella's house.

Late in the evening of the following day, a rather tough-looking young fellow made his appearance at the old Evelyn mansion, and demanded of good Mrs. Watrous an interview with her master.

"A young type-sticker or pressman of the 'tough' variety, in his holiday outfit!" was the old lady's mental comment; and she asked him a little sharply what he could want with Mr. Evelyn.

"It's a little business affair, and de boss is expectin' me, you dear, handsome old creature!" was the free and easy response. "I'm the Mackerelville Modoc, an' don't you furgit it. Jest carry my chromo-lithograph to his royal highness, an' it'll be all right."

And here the young terror set down a well-stuffed portmanteau he was holding jauntily in his left hand, and tilted back his natty little hat as if he had come to stay.

"I can't think that Mr. Evelyn can have made an appointment with—with such a person as you seem to be, young man," said the housekeeper with increasing disfavor. "Don't you think you may have mistaken the house?"

"Nary a mistake, my dear! Come, stir your stumps, if you don't want me to freeze in my tracks. Is this the way you receive a gentle-

man who drops in on your master by special appointment?"

The good dame was nigh to forgetting her Quaker antecedents in her growing indignation.

"Gentleman, indeed!" she snorted, with a toss of her antique head-dress. "And I'd have you to know, young man, that I've no stumps or anything else to stir in your behalf! More-over—"

She was interrupted by Evelyn himself, who, having caught the sounds of an altercation, abruptly appeared from the dining-room.

"What is the disturbance?" said he advancing with some show of temper to the street door. "Who is the young man, dame, and what—"

Here he was interrupted in his turn by a swift sign from the intruder.

"Oh, it is you, eh? Come right in here. I was expecting you, but not quite so soon."

And, to Mrs. Watrous's astonishment and discomfort, the young master disappeared with his strange guest into the reception-room, leaving her to wonder at it all, with the knob of the street door still in her hand.

"How could I have known you?" said Evelyn, with his short laugh.

The young Mackerellvillian, who was, of course, none other than the work-girl detective in a fresh disguise, set down the portmanteau, and quietly took a proffered chair.

A trusty messenger had brought to her a few hours previous Evelyn's summary report of his interview with Job Mixer, and here she was to be present at the appointment that had been fixed upon.

"It still wants half an hour to nine," said Evelyn, seating himself, "and I will give you a more detailed account than I could find time to write. But what have you in the valise?"

"Do you forget," asked Waifa, with a smile, "the market basket that figured in the lightning changes of last night?"

"I remember it."

"Well, as I am neither an old apple-woman nor a colleen just at present, the portmanteau is in somewhat better keeping than the basket would be."

"Ah, I understand. And Evelyn forthwith repeated in detail all that had passed between him and the tramp, concluding with the query: "Well, what do you think of it all?"

"That Mr. Job Mixer is a fraud!" was the prompt reply. "But whether a fraud on his own account, or as the Enemy's instrument, is yet to be decided."

"Just what I think. If a fraud on his own account, what, in your opinion, can be his object?"

"To obtain the money from you that he has ceased to obtain from the Enemy."

"And his supposed revenge?"

"A *prima facie* lie, in either case! At all events, a most unlucky complication."

"I agree with you. Now, in case he is still in the Enemy's interest?"

"We must be cautious, yet bold."

"Certainly; and with the Enemy's *ruse*, so nearly fatal, of the Second Avenue Railroad Bridge, still fresh in our minds."

"Certainly; but we must seem to trust in him implicitly."

"And enter into any expedition he may propose?"

"Yes; but not too eagerly, and with due regard for your appointment with the clairvoyante at midnight."

"True, my dauntless friend; but doesn't one important fact escape you?"

"What is that?"

"That, according to this Job Mixer, your various disguises are no longer of any avail, even if they ever have been, which may well be doubted."

Waifa seemed greatly impressed.

"The fact of your attempted abduction," Evelyn went on, "proves that any disguise you may wear, any character you may assume, would fail to throw dust in the eyes of the Enemy."

"True," said the work-girl detective, thoughtfully. "Nothing seems to escape him."

"What then?"

"Oh, my disguises must be continued; that is all. They will at least deceive the enemy's instruments, most likely, even if thrown away upon the enemy himself. Moreover, I could not accompany you amid these perils in my own proper character."

Evelyn nodded his acquiescence, and at that moment the bell rung.

"It is doubtless our man," said he, rising quickly. "I must prevent further complications with good Mrs. Watrous. Doubtless Mr. Mixer's appearance will inspire her with even greater mistrust than you occasioned her."

CHAPTER XXI.

JOB MIXER.

MR. JOB MIXER, as the new-comer proved to be, had, with the assistance of a barber and some second-hand clothier, effected some improvement in his personal appearance, though even yet he could hardly be described as prepossessing, with a strict regard for veracity.

As he entered the reception-room, and the

door closed behind him, he naturally eyed the unexpected presence of the Mackerellville Modoc with more or less distrust.

But Evelyn lost no time in making the pair acquainted with each other, adding:

"This young man, formerly in my employ, often accompanies me in out-of-the-way places, and is fully to be trusted."

"All right, sir," said Job, slowly taking a seat, with his eyes still fixed searchingly upon his fellow-visitor. "Though to-night's job—that is, if you care to take it, sir—may lead us into a somewhat out-of-the-way corner, still I don't see what good this young feller's goin' along kin do."

The pseudo-tough smiled in a somewhat sinister way, and stretching forth his imbrowned hands—shapely, but firm, supple-looking hands, by the way—doubled them up rather suggestively.

"You don't know my young friend's varied talents," said Evelyn, affably. "In fact, pugilistic science may be considered one of them. I call him Jack, for short."

"Oh, I ain't a-castin' no insinuations ag'in' the young feller!" Mr. Mixer made haste to exclaim. "But am I to speak right out afore him?"

"Certainly. He has my full confidence."

"All right, boss."

"Now to business," said Evelyn. "Have you seen the Deep One, as you call him, since your conversation with me?"

"No, sir; but I've had word from him."

"How?"

"The Deep 'Un's got more chaps of my stripe than me in his interest."

"Ah! And doubtless from one of such you received word from him after separating from me?"

"Exactly."

"Well?"

"The Deep 'Un's on the point of makin' tracks for the Hermitage. Before goin' he wants to see me. I thought you might want to be on hand, so as to see whether or not I'm goin' to do the square thing by you."

"That would be well. When are you to meet him?"

"To-night at eleven."

"Where?"

"Not far from the Mott Haven station, where he's mebbe expectin' to ketch a way train for the Hermitage, *via* Pleasantville or Chappaqua, on the Harlem road."

"But exactly where?"

"You're all-fired pertick'lar."

"It becomes me to be so, when meditating a leap in the dark. Particularize the place of appointment, or take yourself off."

"Oh, I didn't mean to make you huffy. It's at a lumber wharf, on the water's edge, about midway betwixt the north side of the bridge an' the Mott Haven station."

"Ah! a sufficiently deserted and suspicious spot. Almost as lonely, in fact, as the middle of the Second Avenue Bridge might be!" and Evelyn threw a searching glance at the fellow.

But Mixer seemed unaffectedly impervious to the shaft, and only looked up with a stare.

"I don't know about the place you name, sir, for I was never there," said he, quietly. "But the lumber wharf is lonely, an' no mistake. Howsomever, that's natural enough. The Deep 'Un's deep or he's nothin'."

"I understand."

"My purpersion is this," the man went on. "I'd go on to the place of meetin', an' you'd foller, hidin' in among the lumber piles, so's to witness my meetin' with the Deep 'Un."

"And overhear his words, perhaps?" said Evelyn, eagerly.

"You couldn't well do that, sir, unless you was cheek by jowl, for the Deep 'Un's words are like steel on velvet."

"How shall you manage?"

"We shall have to be on hand a little before eleven, so that you kin get stowed away. I should say we'd better be startin' now."

Evelyn stole a glance at Waifa, whose glance in return said, "Yes, by all means," and the trio at once set out, it being agreed that Job should seem a stranger to the others until the place of rendezvous was reached.

It was after half-past ten when they began to cross the Third Avenue Harlem Bridge, Mixer slouching on a few yards in advance.

"Shall you," whispered Waifa to her companion, "consider the mere fact of the meeting taking place under our eyes as proof of Mixer's good faith with us?"

"Not altogether, perhaps; but the test, if successful, will be something in his favor."

"Granted; but shall you remain satisfied with that alone?"

"What do you mean?"

"If satisfied that the Deep One is the demon we are intent upon hunting down, shall you be merely content with his identification to night?"

"Tell me first what, in that case, you would advise."

The work-girl detective's eyes flashed with a resentful glow.

"I should not wait for any after-action—any Hermitage adjournment," said she, with a deadly inflection in her voice. "I should propose to

attempt his arrest on the spot, or failing in that, to shoot him down instantly."

As Evelyn did not reply at once, but seemed to be thinking hard, she went on:

"Let us not forget *what* an enemy the man has been to us, especially to *me*, and be absolutely ruthless, should occasion offer."

"It would be risky, unless we were absolutely sure."

"But supposing that to be the case."

"Then I consent. No quarter shall be our motto."

Waifa drew a long breath of relief.

"How glad I am to hear you say that!" she murmured, her hand instinctively creeping to the deadly weapons concealed upon her person. "But one good shot or stroke would be all I could ask!"

Surely this seeming bloodthirstiness, or unmaidenliness, if you choose, may be pardoned to the young woman's desperateness, which was but natural under the extraordinary circumstances of her case.

Evelyn was decidedly of this opinion, at all events, as he strode on in silence, with his light-footed companion at his side, and the back of their guide constantly in view.

The latter, however, upon reaching the northern end of the bridge, suddenly, and without looking once behind, slanted off to the left, and moved rapidly along some landings, littered with piles of brick and other building material, recently unloaded from some lighters and canal-boats that were moored there, toward a great lumber yard and wharf some distance up the stream, about midway between them and the railroad bridge to the west.

The two friends followed as closely as his attendant shadow, if, indeed, any could have been distinguished amid the almost unrelieved obscurity of the miserable locality.

Nor was it any less dangerous than obscure. The wharf-floorings were in many places rotten or ill-built, there were dark, watery interspaces to be overstepped; the piles of material often had a toppling suggestion, as if a sudden jar might bring them crumbling upon the passer's head; the deserted barges and schooners creaked uneasily at their moorings, and, to add to these difficulties, the darkness was such that the way had to be rather guessed than decided, and often very blindly at that.

"It's like the blind following the blind," grumbled Evelyn, in a low voice, after this sort of uncertainty had continued several minutes and he had barked his shins more than once. "No better place for a trap, if one is intended."

"Still we're in for it, and I feel sure that none can be intended just yet awhile at least," said his companion, encouragingly. "Keep your eyes on our guide. Hist! there, he has come to a halt."

This was true. They could just distinguish Job, who, after crossing a plank bridge over an intervening water strip, had at last paused at the edge of a great lumber-wharf, whose surface was nearly covered with lofty piles of boards, apparently intersected at intervals by little tunnel-like passageways.

"What time is it?" he whispered, in a husky, fear-smitten voice, as they approached.

Evelyn produced his watch, and, striking a cigar-fuse, applied its momentary flash to the dial.

"Five minutes to eleven," he replied.

"Quick, then! slip into hiding. That nook will do, right over the water. Good Lord! he may come any minute."

"All right, my man; but what is there to fear?"

"Fear!" the fellow's teeth fairly chattered. "If you'd ever stood elbow to elbow with the Deep 'Un, you'd know! Hurry, hurry!"

And, without giving them any time for a selection, he pushed them into the hiding-place he had indicated—not the choicest one, either, should one of the tall, narrow lumber piles surrounding three sides of it chance to prove shaky—and slipped back into the open space, where he stood anxiously expectant.

Still they retained an unobstructed view of his position, and at this moment the moon, until then wholly hidden, partly struggled out from its cloudy veil, and rendered the open space comparatively distinct.

"Mr. Mixer," called out Waifa, in a cautious but penetrating whisper, "don't forget that we're keeping you covered, my man." Her revolver was in her hand as she spoke. "The first sign of treachery will seal *your* fate, whatever else may betide."

A half-savage, half-imploring gesture to be silent was the only response.

Waifa was, however, about to repeat her warning when Evelyn's hand closed upon her shoulder with a sudden grip.

"Hush!" he rather breathed than whispered. "Look!"

No occasion of any further cautioning.

Job Mixer was no longer alone in the dimly-lighted open space.

A form was standing at his side—a form that might have risen out of the ground or grown out of the air, it was there so unexpectedly, so unaccountably—a dread, mysterious and yet seemingly form, at whose stern gaze and veiled de-

meanor the attendant ruffian seemed to cringe and cower, as might a coarse, minor demon in the immense presence of the Master-Fiend.

It was an awe in which neither Evelyn nor Waifa could help from sharing, at least to a certain degree.

The face was masked, the head loftily, haughtily poised, the eyes burning coals, the carriage grandly, subtly commanding; and nothing could exceed the almost feminine beauty of the graceful, yet powerful, cloaked figure of this terrible Unknown.

He was evidently speaking to his minion in swift, pregnant tones, to judge by the latter's attitude, but not a sound could reach the eaves-dropping pair, strain their ears as they would.

The Deep One's voice might well have been, as it had been described, as soundless and as deadly as steel on velvet.

By a great effort, Waifa disengaged herself from the spell that was upon her.

Was not this the dread being who had so remorselessly hunted her down from her very infancy, and should she now hesitate, with his breast proffered unconsciously to her unerring marksmanship?

No!

Her hand tightened upon her revolver, and she leveled it.

But at that instant an unlucky movement on the part of Evelyn caused one of the lumber piles to shake.

"Ha!" hissed the Deep One, suddenly clutching his minion with a hand of iron, and hurling him prostrate. "Treachery, as I feared!"

He drew a pistol, firing it full at the fallen wretch, while at the same instant the work-girl detective's revolver cracked murderously from the ambush.

CHAPTER XXII.

THICKENING TOILS.

BUT the Deep One had slightly swerved at the instant of the double shot, and the work-girl detective's avenging bullet, though perfectly aimed, was without appreciable effect.

The Unknown gave utterance to a low, blood-curdling laugh.

Then, with all but incredible activity, he sprang across the body of his victim, by a quick, effective thrust upset the lumber piles behind which the two friends were ensconced, throwing them into the river amid the crashing mass, and disappeared.

The water was deep and icy cold, but there were any number of floating planks for company, so that Waifa, upon recovering from the first shock of the submersion, quickly availed herself of their support.

She was still floating around in the darkness, and was about calling out for Evelyn when his strong hand seized her, and then they both hung, partly supported off the end of the string-piece, which, however, was too high for them to climb at the moment.

"Don't call out—try to bear the cold in silence for a minute or two!" said Evelyn, through his chattering teeth. "That mysterious fiend may be only hanging around up there to get another shot at us."

"I can stand it—don't fear for me," said Waifa, with commendable cheerfulness, and she partly relieved him of her weight, climbing a little higher out of the water. "Poor Job! he stood the test, but it cost him his life."

"Yes," said Evelyn; "he evidently meant to be true to us, but now—"

"Hallo, below there!" called out a shaky but still vigorous voice from above; "be you alive or drowned, you-uns down there?"

"Why, it's Job!" cried Waifa, joyfully; "it's Job himself!"

"So it is!" said Evelyn.

In another moment, with Job's assistance, they were up on the wharf, but dripping wet and shivering, as a matter of course.

"Come," said Job. "Not another word till I've taken you where you can dry yourselves. Otherwise, you might catch your deaths. I know of a safe place where even the Deep One would never think of looking for you."

They followed him trustingly enough now.

"For my part," said the pseudo-tough, though chattering not a little, "I'd be willing enough for him to find us again. My knife isn't spoilt, if my powder is, and, but for an unlucky accident, my shot would have rung the bell over his heart."

"Never mind the Deep One now. He's far away before this. Hark! there's the up-train whistle. It's like enough the one he will board at the station, from what he told me."

They now followed him on board a dilapidated-looking canal-boat, from whose cabin stovepipe a thin column of smoke was issuing.

A moment later they were all crowded into the caboose, the heat from whose stove expedited the drying-out process in the case of the amateur detectives.

"I'm a friend of the care-taker on this old boat," explained Mixer, lighting a tallow-dip. "He happens to be on a spree just now, but I would be welcome, even if he were here."

Here the candle-light showed a wound grazing

his temple, from which a streak of blood had coagulated on his cheek.

"You are at least wounded!" cried Waifa. "The Deep One has at least left his ugly mark on you."

The man gave a sickly smile as he raised his hand to the wound, and they both noticed that he was frightfully pale and agitated.

"Yes," said he. "The Deep One's start to one side as he an' you fired together saved my life, as well as his own. As it was, when I felt the furrow of his bullet, I gave myself up for a dead man. It was only after he was gone, an' when I began to think of you-uns in the water, that I discovered I wasn't much hurt, arter all."

"You're a good fellow, anyway!" said Waifa, heartily. "And I am sorry for having mistrusted you."

"But you trust me now, eh?" cried the man, eagerly addressing them both.

"Yes," said Evelyn. "It would be unfair to foster a doubt of your good faith now. But what was it that so suddenly alarmed the Deep One, and made him turn on you?"

"It must have been that slight noise from your hiding-place. The Deep One has ears like an Injun, an' to suspect with him is to kill, without wasting a question."

"Still, you are now safe, Job," said Waifa. "Why are you still so white and trembling?"

"I can't help it, young feller, by Jupiter, I can't," was the earnest rejoinder. "I don't know how it is, but the very presence of the Deep One—the glitter of his eyes, the slippery softness of his whisper, the swayin' to an' fro of his body, jest like a snake when preparin' to strike—has allers affected me that way. Gr-r-rh!" his teeth rattled like castanets. "It allers has, an' it allers will!"

Neither Waifa nor Evelyn made any comment at once, remembering as they did the similarly creeping and uncanny influence that had been exerted upon them by that ominous presence for the time being.

"In that case," said Evelyn, after a pause, "I don't see how you ever got used to his interviews with you, few as you say they were."

"I never did, sir—fore the good Lord, I never did! But it was a fascination that held me tight—makin' me feel that somehow he could drag me back to his bidding, even if I should place leagues of land an' sea betwixt him an' me. Enoch felt jest the same way, an' I suppose he kept on feelin' it, till the Deep One's bullet cut him short, as it was so near cuttin' me short, too."

"But you don't feel that way now, I hope?"

"No, by jinks!" cried Job, shaking his burly body with sudden energy, and a set, desperate look coming into his coarse face. "I'm conquerin' the infernal fear slowly—I'm sure of it. An' I'll lead on the sleuth-cry that tracks the Deep One to his doom, till I drop dead in my tracks, even as my brother Enoch did—though, to be sure, he napped a nasty one by chance, and while in the fiend's own service."

Both Evelyn and Waifa were highly satisfied to hear such determined words from one who had confessedly been their arch-enemy's unquestioning hireling, but in whom they now felt a growing confidence.

"But," said Evelyn, "shall you be able to win your way back into your terrible task-master's confidence, think you, after what has happened?"

"Yes, sir," said Job, thoughtfully. "In fact, I don't think I have wholly lost it."

"How?"

"No, sir. I think it very likely that by this time the Deep One regrets his haste, an' is perhaps sorry he killed me—as of course he supposes he did. I have done good service for him in my day; and, besides, how is he sure that you-uns was a spyin' on him with my connivance? Anyway, I shall obey his last instructions jest as if nothin' had happened, an' mebbe this scar on my forehead will help to convince him that I'm true blue to him, in spite of his bad temper."

"His last instructions?"

"Yes; didn't you see him talkin' to me, though of course you couldn't overhear a word?"

"Yes, yes; and I should have questioned you on this point at the outset. What were his words?—his exact words, if you can remember them?"

"Can I? As if any of his words, once burnt into one's memory, could ever be rubbed out ag'in!"

"What were they, then?"

"These: 'I go to the Hermitage to-night, perhaps to remain indefinitely. Expect a message from me at any day, at any hour. There is work to do, and plenty of it. Serve me faithfully, and you shall be rich. Make such another blunder as you did in that kidnapping affair, and your fate shall be infinitely more deadly than that of the houseless cur that starves in the gutter. Take this, and come to my bidding; neglect it at your peril!' That was all. He had no sooner passed me the purse than his suspicion was aroused, an' he dashed me down."

"So he gave you a reward, after all."

"Yes, sir; I haven't examined it yet."

Job produced an old-fashioned silk-knitted

purse, from which he poured into his palm, with evident astonishment, five, bright double eagles.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "The Deep One was never so generous before. We'll let this go on old scores."

A smile that boded no good to his whilom patron crossed his face, and he was about returning the coins to their receptacle, when Waifa, who had been looking curiously at the latter, arrested his hand.

"That's an odd purse," said she. "Permit me to examine it."

"Have it, too, an' welcome, young feller," said Job, and, with a grin, he handed over the purse, slipping the loose coins into his pocket. "The lucre will answer my needs, without the flimsy thing as held it."

Waifa's eyes glistened as she examined the purse attentively.

"Did the Deep One ever give you such another money-holder as this before?" she asked.

"Never that or any other kind. Not he; it was only a loose coin or bank-note now an' then before."

"Thank you for your gift; it is such an odd old purse I should like to retain it." And she slipped it out of sight.

Evelyn was about to question her when an eloquent glance restrained him.

She subsequently found occasion to inform him that Madame Alceste had been accustomed to knitting just such old-fashioned, leaded silk purses as the one Job had given her, and that this might be a fresh clew to tracing the woman.

They had now succeeded in thoroughly drying their clothes, and Evelyn, glancing at his watch, announced with some concern that it was past midnight.

Waifa snatched up her portmanteau, which she had not neglected to bring with her from the lumber dock.

"Better late than never for your visit!" said she. "Doubtless Madame Estrella is wondering—"

She paused, repentant of her rashness, with a confused glance at Job, who was supposed to know nothing of Madame Estrella, but the fellow's harsh face instantly lighted up.

"No need of keepin' lock-jawed before me, sir," said he, with a glance at Evelyn. "If it's the clairvoyante you mean, I know her very well."

Both Evelyn and Waifa were becomingly surprised at what they heard.

"How did that come about?" asked Evelyn.

"Easy enough. She's got a mean hound of a brother named Clape, who used to give me odd jobs at cleanin' boots, runnin' errands, or mebbe seein' him home when he was too drunk to walk, for I've long been familiar with that Harlem neighborhood where they live. Mr Clape is no gentleman. Barrin' your presence, sir—for I know he was your bookkeeper—he's no better than a loafer."

"Don't bar my presence in that," said Evelyn. "The rascal is off for the border, after stealing my money."

"You don't say so? Well, Clape owed me a dollar, and would have chiseled me out of it, if it hadn't occurred to me to go to madame, his sister about it. She paid me out of her own pocket, an' now an' then gave me some odd jobs, too. It's many a time I've had her permission to sleep in a little basement room of hers, when without it I might have froze in the streets."

"In the basement, eh? What do you think of the clairvoyante?"

"She's been sorter kind to me," said Job, evasively.

"But what do you think of her?"

Strange to say, the man's answer was identical with Waifa's on more than one occasion.

"What do I think of her?" he repeated slowly. "I think she's a terrible woman!"

Evelyn was longing to sound him with regard to madame's mysterious guest or patient, "Ma'm-selle Justine," but a visual consultation with Waifa caused him to defer the subject to another day.

So he contented himself with wishing Job Mixer good-night, after arranging for future conferences with him, and then lost no time in hurrying away with his companion.

"It shall be my turn to wait for you to-night," said Waifa, as they separated before reaching the clairvoyante's house. "Try to give Liz a hint as to my vicinity, should you wish to communicate with me during the interview."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

LATE—outlandish, in fact—as was the hour, Evelyn found himself expected at Madame Estrella's residence.

He had some difficulty in giving Liz the promised hint, while being ushered by her into the august presence, and madame received him with scarcely restrained eagerness.

"Make no apologies as to your appearance," said she, with scarcely a glance at the young man's attire, which was naturally enough far from presentable. "I saw it all—the terrible adventure you last passed through. Oh, it was terrible! If I had not been a woman, how eagerly— But, thank Heaven, you are once

more in safety! But you had a companion? I saw both of you in the old boat-cabin along with that odd man, Job; but since then, my second sight has been blurred."

"My young companion," said Evelyn, "separated from me before I reached your house, madame."

He spoke dryly, and with guardedness; for the woman's excitement of manner rendered her so charming, and she was looking so exceptionally beautiful, that he felt a certain apprehension of her influence upon both his mind and senses.

"You must come into my consultation-room," said she. "I feel my gift strongly upon me at this 'witching hour,' as Shakespeare calls it, and there is much I may have to reveal."

The visitor then found himself installed in the famous red-and-gold chamber, face to face with his extraordinary hostess, even as Waifa had been on a former occasion.

Glancing covertly at madame, as she sunk dreamily, but still with suppressed eagerness, into her luxurious chair, he could scarcely wonder that Waifa, even with her own youthful beauty to depend on, had felt a jealous fear of this woman's influence upon his imagination.

Amid the rich *entourage* of this semi-boudoir, she looked like a species of revived Theodora—an intellectual sultana, with the world of luxury and prodigality at her beck, and unconjecturable desires and emotions as keeping rhythmic harmony with the soft music of her heathen breast.

A gorgeous dressing-gown set off her graceful, yet powerful proportions to superb advantage. Clouds of delicate lace were about her perfectly-molded, gleaming arms and neck; her splendid hair was picturesquely arranged, with a little diadem of diamonds and sapphires resting negligently above her brow, jewels likewise glistened at her wrists and throat, the suppressed excitement of her manner had imparted a beautiful glow to her face and eyes, and, in addition to all this, the cruel and haughty expression, which had mostly been the ruling characteristic of her beauty, had disappeared, and all that remained was melting urbanity and complacency.

Evelyn drew a long breath, as if vaguely conscious that some sort of trying test of his fidelity to the woman he loved might be in preparation for him, and it was only when the clairvoyante had taken her eyes from his face, and seemingly fallen into a dreamy, abstracted mood, that he began to feel a return of his matter-of-fact energy and watchfulness.

"I won't weary you with repeating my thanks for your forbearance in the case of my miserable brother," said she. "Perhaps that forbearance was as much prompted by contemptuousness as by generosity, eh? I see that I am right, and I do not blame you. He is a worthless dog, and I rejoice that he is only my half-brother, after all. What would you? I had to have some sort of male protector to lean on. But I am done with that ingrate forever. Excuse me, Mr. Evelyn, but would you object to my smoking a cigarette?"

"By no means, madame. Smoking is a vice I occasionally indulge myself, and I have sojourned in Mexico and South America, where the fairest and the loveliest are smoking constantly."

She thanked him with a gracious gesture, and touched a silver bell at her side.

"My cigarettes," said she, as Liz put in an appearance.

The girl brought some on a silver salver from the adjoining room, but they did not suit madame, after testing the contents of one or two by an application to her pretty nostrils.

"Bring me the Turkish tobacco," said she, "and you shall roll me some. But wait; I shall have to wait on myself."

As she quitted the room, Evelyn seized the opportunity to acquaint the child with Waifa's proximity.

Liz nodded, and only had time for a single reply before madame returned, but that response was sufficiently impressive.

"I'm on the watch, sir," said the girl, without moving her lips, "but don't you neglect being careful. You're in danger of your life every minute you are here."

Evelyn had plenty of leisure for turning these words over in his thoughts while madame was dreamily smoking cigarette after cigarette, though fortunately not quite so fast as they could be rolled into shape by Liz, who was presently dismissed, after a decanter and some glasses had been set upon the table.

"My life in danger, and from this woman?" thought Evelyn to himself, while contemplating the beautiful creature who, with half-closed eyes and in a *dolce far niente* attitude, was dreamily exhaling the delicate wreaths of smoke from her lips and nostrils without in any wise losing her fascinating charm of person. "I cannot believe it. My senses, my peace of mind, might be endangered by an undue tarrying in this delicious atmosphere, but scarcely my life."

Presently she spoke.

"You will pardon me, I hope, Mr. Evelyn," said she, "for apparently trifling thus. But my clairvoyant mood, which is necessary to

the importance of our interview, is often coy save to persistent wooing, and I am not forgetting you."

"Pray think nothing of me, madame," was the polite reply. "I am most comfortable—even to remain here seems a privilege."

The last words were complimentary—he would have recalled them when too late—and his reward was a grateful glance from under the dreamful eyelids that completed his discomfort, so to speak.

"May I trouble you for a glass of the wine?" she asked, with a gesture of her snowy hand, which was loaded with jewels. "And of course you will help yourself. It is Maraschino, and I think the best."

He could not but comply, consoling himself with the thought that, if treachery was meditated, she was drinking from the same decanter, and the liquor was, moreover, most delicious.

"You are studying my rings?" said madame, lazily, after sipping the contents of her glass. "I know it is bad taste to wear so many, but it is a weakness of mine."

"I was observing the hands, rather than their jewels," he replied.

"Do you find them pretty?"

"I find them even more wonderful than beautiful."

"Why—in what way?"

"I remember their marvelous muscularity on a certain public occasion. It is simply astounding, considering their shapely femininity of appearance."

She seemed not altogether pleased, and made haste to render her hands less conspicuous.

"I am strong, very strong," she admitted, in a low voice. "And, to be sure, the young Southern phenomenon—also very strong, though something of a charlatan—was as a baby in my grasp. But you are mistaken as to the muscularity, at least in my case. It was something more than that."

He could well believe her. As she half-lolled there, in the dulcet luxury of her beauty and her grace, there was no suggestion of helplessness in her indolence. Lovely and supple in her supineness, there was yet a suggestion of tigerish strength and slumbering power in her quiescence.

"Tell me honestly, Mr. Evelyn," was her next lazy question, "do you think me a charlatan?"

The bestowing of compliments was not in Evelyn's line, and he was intent upon not departing from his habit now, in spite of Madame Estrella's fascinations. Nevertheless, he reflected before replying.

"Let us first," said he, gravely, "be sure of our definition of the term 'charlatan,'" said he. "In its better sense—that is, apart from its mountebank sense—I take it to mean, say, a person of unwarrantable pretensions."

"About that, I should say."

"Then I cannot consider you a charlatan, madame. At all events, the genuineness of your clairvoyant pretensions I consider to have been proved to my satisfaction—almost to my complete satisfaction, indeed."

She seemed partly pleased.

"Might I not have greater gifts, even more marvelous and occult than clairvoyance?" said she, softly.

"I do not say you might not."

"Such, for instance, as the reproduction of past, together with the foretelling of future, happenings?"

"You will pardon me, I hope, for saying that such a gift is, in my opinion, an impossibility."

"Moreover," she went on, scarcely heeding his words, "such a gift, for instance, as never growing old—the embodiment of the secret of earthly immortality in my own person?"

Evelyn smiled, and he partook of another glass of the Maraschino, which this time, while helping herself also, she poured out for him in a dreamy way, after disposing of her last cigarette.

"You excite my incredulity, madam," said he, "even while interesting me."

"But why? The illustrious Cagliostro not only made, but supported, just such pretensions."

"I am well aware of it, madam. And so, doubtless, did Cornelius Agrippa and perhaps Doctor Faustus and the Witch of Endor before him."

"Well?"

"Well—I drink to your long life and undiminished fascinations, madame!—and if Count Cagliostro, otherwise Joseph Balsamo, was not both charlatan and impostor, I would like to know what he was?"

She had touched her glass to his and was looking gravely at him over its sparkling brim as they both drank.

Gravity in an exceptionally beautiful woman is even more infatuating than affability, because it implies privilege, no less than confidence.

"You have much to learn, my good friend," said the clairvoyante. "The fountain of perpetual youth, though undiscovered by Ponce de Leon, is not necessarily non-existent. The elixir of life is no myth, though it rewarded not the researches of the Rosicrucian dreamers. And neither is earthly immortality a fable."

"Why not include the Philosopher's Stone?"

"Pray do not jest. The transmutation of baser metals into virgin gold (not an absurdity either, when the pearl it elf, nature's crystallized tear-drop, may be artificially propagated) were an ignoble discovery to that which would arrest physical decay, and render beautiful earthly life everlasting."

"Granted, if an eternity of earthly life were desirable."

"Is it not so? What can be more desirable?"

"The eternity of the spirit—the life that is beyond us, and of which earthly existence is no more than a fleeting shadow—that is, provided that happiness be secured therewith; and happiness is the reward of virtue."

She made an impatient gesture that was more than half-contemptuous.

"It is you that are the dreamer, more than I," she said. "Earthly immortality is all. If it exists not, there is none."

The gross skepticism, or materialism, of this declaration, though impressive as coming from such beautiful lips, elicited no answer from George Evelyn, who merely looked grave. Himself a man of profound religious convictions, though in no sense a sectarian, he had no sympathy whatever with the growing skepticism of the day.

Madame Estrella's next remark was a yet more startling one.

"I am myself," said she, quietly, "an embodiment of the existence of earthly immortality. William Clape is not even my half brother, though his mother was nominally mine also. My blood relations are shadows of the distant past. As I am now—powerful, beautiful, self-reliant, strong—I have lived on the earth for ages. Mr. Evelyn, looked at me intently. Read in the mirrors of my eyes the truth of what I claim—of what at the first breath seems so preposterous and grotesque."

George made an angry gesture of dissent, but at the same instant he found himself gazing into the clairvoyante's eyes, as she had directed him.

The result was startling.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE DEPTHS OF A WOMAN'S EYES.

HAD the maraschino affected him or was he the victim of some psychological spell?

At all events, as he gazed into those visual depths, those luminous wells of thoughtful mystery, he became entranced by what he saw, felt, and at last acted therein.

First, they were indeed mirrors, in which past ages, with their attendant landscapes, characters, events and incidents, mostly of a painful or sanguinary nature, passed before his fascinated gaze like an animated panorama of history and tradition, and in all of whose scenes the clairvoyante's personality figured vividly, easily recognizable, though under a hundred varying environments.

Presently, out of this strange phantasm, there came to his ears, the clairvoyante's voice—sweet, siren-like and melodious, as he had heard it in his waking moments, but far-off, shadowy, unreal, as if calling to him through the mists of vanished centuries.

"Thus far," said the voice, "you have only witnessed. Now, become merged into what you see; live, act and think therein with her who, from having been your fated companion amid the revolutions of the past, must cleave ever more to your side, your wife, your love, your *alter ego*, through the years to come!"

He made a tremendous effort to burst from the spell that was upon him, but in vain.

He did become merged into that mystic past-life of the soul. As her companion did he move amid the changing life vistas of that strangely substantiated past. Ever as her twin-spirit, from periods ante-dating the pyramids, on and on, through numberless vicissitudes of war, peace, revolution and change, amid the ruin of empires, the crumbling of successive dynasties, the passings of nations—ever with her, and yet with a mortal, paralyzing dread of her that was as lead upon his time-wearied, century-burdened soul!

Then there was another pause, and out of this again, the mystic murmurs of that shadowy voice.

"Withdraw thyself back out of the past in which thou wast once an actor," said the voice; "be thy present modern self once more, and say what thou dost behold."

He seemed to obey, with no volition or desire of his own.

The vistas faded, and in their stead was the interior of a prison cell, the cell of one condemned. In its inmate, a woman sleeping on a pallet of straw, he dimly recognized his companion of the past—the beautiful clairvoyante. I say dimly, because he recognized, and yet did not recognize her. 'Twas she, and yet not she. In gazing upon the loveliness of the sleeper, he beheld immense age showing through the lineaments like the inscriptions upon a palimpsest. The sleeper's beauty was as a transparent mask, through which could be seen her past existences back through eons of time.

"Pass into the cell with her," commanded the mystic voice once more. "Restore thine ancient

companion to the lost freshness of her immortality with the talisman of thy kiss."

It seemed to Evelyn that he obeyed, though sorely against his will. He kissed the sleeper. Instantly she awoke, not to consciousness alone, but to all the superhuman beauty which had enchaind him through those ages of companionship, and which was reflected by the clairvoyante's present personality. Not only this. She threw her arms about him. He strove to avoid them, as if they had been serpents, but without avail. Her lips clung to his, though he would have shrunk from them as from a tigress's kiss.

"My fate-pledged, fore-ordained beloved! why art thou so cold?" she murmured. "See you not that my prison walls (allegorical of my desolating loneliness without thee) are crumbling and disappearing at thy kiss? Come; I am but Madame Estrella, the clairvoyante now, in these latter days, but none the less are you and I inseparable forevermore!" He seemed to struggle furiously to throw her from him, as a hideous Lamia witch that was bent on feeding upon his life. He did not succeed, but he passed into a sort of convulsion, after which he was himself again.

As he came out of his trance, Madame Estrella with one hand was sprinkling cooling drops of cologne upon his forehead, and with the other she was nervously fluttering her cambric handkerchief into his face.

Her countenance, from wearing an expression of the intensest concern, was suddenly illuminated with a joyous smile.

"You are more impressionable than I thought," said she, gently. "I shouldn't have let you explore my eyes as you did. It was dangerous. And yet I thought—I hoped— But no matter; thank Heaven, you are almost yourself again."

He repelled her almost rudely.

Had his last sensations been solely imaginary, or had the dream-woman's loathsome embrace and kiss been substantiated by the reality, during his helplessness, in this woman's personality?

"Let me understand," said he, sternly. "You say you hoped, you thought—but what? I demand to know."

Her bosom was heaving tumultuously, and there was a lovely blush in her face; but, together with this, there was a glitter in those miracle-working eyes of hers that might mean danger for him.

Instinctively, though exactly why he did not know, the significance of the old couplet was suggested to his mind:

"Earth hath no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned!"

But his sternness was implacable, for the moment at least, and his brow was dark and resentful.

"I know your thought, Mr. Evelyn," said she, with forced composure. "Tell me truly, were it, as you imagine, possible—that is, that I had momentarily forgotten my womanhood, or rather the laws of conventionality, and in so far have betrayed an overmastering love for you—what then?"

The plainness of the question (although in reality but the echo of his own thought) disconcerted him in his turn.

First, last, and before everything else, George Evelyn was a true man, and therefore a gentleman.

"You are probably not in earnest," he began, with the utmost gentleness. "I can scarcely imagine—"

"My question!" she interrupted inexorably. "You know that it was a correct interpretation of your inmost thought. I insist on your answering me!"

"If you really do insist—"

"I do!"

"Then, madame," and there was a touch of heartfelt commiseration and regret in his tone, "it would merely be my hard duty to inform you as to the truth."

"And that would be—"

"That reciprocation would simply be an impossibility on my part; inasmuch as my heart is already, and irrevocably, in another's keeping."

Her bosom was no longer heaving, and her cheeks had whitened, but her eyes were as basilisks.

"And that other?"

"Madame, you press me too nearly; I decline to say."

"Speak!" she panted, hoarsely. "It is the girl, Waifa Target—am I not right?"

He hesitated, and then a look of honest pride came into his eyes.

"I have no reason, madame," said he, rising with a courteous bow, "to deny the accuracy of your penetration."

For an instant her face was convulsed—its change of expression absolutely terrifying him—and then she was, as at the opening of the interview, languid, smiling, and complaisant.

"Do resume your seat, Mr. Evelyn," said she, with a deprecating gesture, while sinking back into her own chair. "You have been the victim of an odd self-deception, which, however, is not unusually associated with the trance-condition when experienced by a novice. I am now about to exercise my gift of clairvoyance, in its legiti-

mate sense, for your further mystification, I trust." And her smile was dazzling.

Evelyn obeyed, smiling amiably in his turn, but, for all that, he did not suffer himself to be deceived. He had had a revealing peep, as it were, into the dark recesses of this strange being's inner nature, and he secretly resolved that it should be his own fault if he failed to profit thereby.

The clairvoyante's eyes were partly closed again, a soft stillness was settling over form and face, and it became evident to Evelyn, from what Waifa had told him, that she was about passing into the clairvoyant state.

"The maraschino!" she whispered. "Pour me some, and drink yourself. It will restore the electrical rhythm between us."

George willingly complied.

"Electrical rhythm is good," he thought to himself, with a smile. "In fact, it may be supposed as touching the true psychological spot."

Directly after drinking, however, he wished that he had abstained. The maraschino had either lost its flavor, or received a new and unpleasant one; and he also remarked that madame had this time refrained from drinking hers, after merely touching it to her lips. However, he had drained his glass, and ceased to give the matter a thought.

"In the experience that I have afforded you," said the clairvoyante, still in her natural voice, though with her eyes wholly closed and her trance-look deepening, "were you satisfied of the genuineness of my gift?"

"I was," was the unhesitating answer. "It was the most extraordinary thing I ever experienced. I don't understand the nature of the influence you exerted upon me, but it was none the less genuine of its kind."

"Do not speak again. My vision is once more going into the past, though without your company. Tell me, though, should I reveal in detail the extraordinary experiences of the woman you love (and I am even now strongly impressed with her atmosphere,) would it be an additional proof to you of the genuineness of my gifts?"

"It would, indeed."

When the clairvoyante next began to speak, which was a few minutes later, it was with the moveless lips and in the hurried, far-away voice that he had recognized as hers in his trance.

To his amazement, the entire subject of her talk was a repetition of Waifa's remarkable history, just as he had heard it from the young girl's lips, though with far greater minutiae of detail, of whose accuracy there could not be the shadow of a doubt.

The clairvoyante's narration lasted the greater part of an hour, at the end of which she was speedily herself again.

"Mr. Evelyn, my dear Mr. Evelyn," said she, with something new in her voice and smile, "you have heard. Are you satisfied?"

Instead of answering, he tried to rise, but found himself powerless to do so, while swiftly succeeding billows of mist, in the intervals of which he could see with perfect clearness, began to roll across his sight.

"I ask you if you are satisfied?" repeated the clairvoyante, and the newness in her voice was now a deadliness.

"Yes, yes; I suppose so," he managed to reply, half-huskily. "To be sure. Why not?"

Failing in another effort to rise, an impotent exasperation possessed him.

"Witch! Sorceress!" he gasped, gnashing his teeth; "what devil's spell have you laid on me? I tell you I am satisfied with your miracle-working, and yet—and yet—" Speech also deserted him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" burst forth the clairvoyante, with demoniac exultation. "I also am satisfied, Evelyn! Wretch, your last glass of maraschino was drugged! You return to your Waifa no more, and she, moreover, is already in the clutch of doom! George Evelyn, you are henceforth mine or Death's!"

Evelyn was appalled.

He made a last effort to rise, and then fell back helpless.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

AFTER that, a species of paralysis overcame Evelyn, in which he was enabled to see, hear and think with comparative distinctness, while speech, motion and almost breath itself had abandoned him.

He heard the terrible woman cross the floor, make the doors fast, and then return.

Then, through his glassy eyes, he could perceive her watching his pale, upturned face and rigid form sternly, but at the same time with a pitying gaze, as if half-reproaching herself for what she had done.

"The powder was not a severe one—I sprinkled it into his wine glass during his trance-dream," he heard her murmur. "Heaven help me, if it should prove fatal!"

He would have shuddered, had he had the power, as he felt her cool hand pass over his brow.

"Poor revenge, indeed," she murmured again, "should I have spited my rival at the expense of this precious life! Yet would I sooner have

him dead here before me than alive for that accursed girl, in all the youthfulness of her melancholy beauty, to possess him for herself. Yes, yes; a hundred times! Oh, how I love him!—I, who never loved mortal thing before, save in the past ages of my existence!—And now, to lose him to her—oh, the thought was madness!"

He could see the terrible loveliness of her face become convulsed with anguish, after which she seemed to master herself.

Then the cooling touch of her palm again passed over his hot forehead and unquiet temples.

From her own words, just spoken, it was evident that the strange being at least believed in the myriad past existences and earthly immortality which she had vauntingly claimed for herself; and, strange to say, even in his present condition, this occasioned the petrified hearer both wonder and curiosity.

The clairvoyante might be a dangerous charlatan, but she was unique in her way, an original wonder-worker, well worth more than passing study.

"No, he will not die," he heard her mutter again. "With care and finesse I may yet save him to the world and to me. Then who knows but I may yet fascinate him into vouchsafing a return of the fierce love for which I hunger? Ha! if he should ever learn the truth—but no; I will not think of it!"

She again crossed the floor, this time to unlock the door and summon Liz.

The spell-bound Evelyn heard the latter enter, and then her exclamation of horror and pity over his condition.

"Oh, the poor man!" cried the girl. "Whatever is the matter with him, ma'm?"

"A temporary paralysis, arising from the trance in which he insisted upon my throwing him," said madame. "We must take care of him, and in secret, or his family would feel scandalized."

"Yes, ma'm."

"The bedroom in the basement is in readiness?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"You sent my policeman to do for that young fellow loitering on the street-corner, as I intimated?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"With what result?"

"The cop told me afterward. He chased the young feller, overhauled him at the river, clubbed the head off of him, an' let him soak in the dark."

Evelyn would have groaned with horror, had he had the power. Heavens! had such a brutal fate overtaken his disguised companion, his beloved Waifa?

"That is well," said madame. "This man must be removed at once."

"To the horsepickle, ma'm?"

"No, fool! to the strong room in the basement. Send Melinda hither."

"She can't come, ma'm. She's havin' a orful time along with ma'mselle."

Madame reflected.

"I must have some assistance besides you," said she. "Is that old hag next door, whom I have befriended, at home?"

"No, ma'm; the cops carried her off, drunk, this mornin'. But, please, ma'm—"

"What is it?"

"There's an old apple-woman at the corner what might answer."

"Who and what is she?"

"A reg'lar bad 'un, ma'm. She carries her fruit in a sort of hand-trunk, and only deals with 'spishus folks arter midnight. I run out sometimes an' buy apples of her. She looks that secret an' wicked you'd think she'd sell her soul for a drink of gin."

Evelyn's heart leaped, for he recognized the description.

"Send or bring her to me," said madame. "I must have somebody."

The door opened and closed as Liz darted away on her errand, and presently Evelyn heard madame also quit the room.

Then he heard voices at the head of the stair, from which he inferred that the apple-woman had been fetched, and was being questioned by the clairvoyante.

Such was really the case, and the examination must have proved satisfactory.

At all events, the trio were not long in making their appearance.

"Are that the gentleman?" exclaimed the newcomer, in a hoarse croak, which Evelyn, nevertheless, recognized as Waifa's dear voice in disguise. "Is he dead or drunk, sure?"

"Ask no questions!" said madame, sternly. "Follow the girl with the lamp, and be ready to assist me on the narrow stairs below, should I require it."

"Yis, ma'm. But, sure an' ye wouldn't thry to kerry sech a big mon all t'yersel'?"

"Do as you're bid, if you would keep my favor!"

The clairvoyante was, indeed, at that moment bending over the helpless and seemingly unconscious man.

Then Evelyn found himself lifted in her powerful arms, and borne away, as if he were no more than a stuffed effigy.

To the majority of men the situation—that of being tenderly carried along in the powerful embrace of a singularly beautiful woman—would have been a most interesting one. To Evelyn, it is needless to say, it was sufficiently repugnant; but the thought that his beloved Waifa was near him once more, and would perhaps gain a confidential foothold in the bosom of that mysterious household, which it was so important that they should explore, was more than a compensation.

He next found himself lying upon a comfortable cot in a snug little room, with madame seated at his side, Liz and the new helper standing near, in respectful waiting for further orders.

"You, Liz," said madame, "run down to Melinda. She may need your help, and if ma'mselle is unusually troublesome you can bring me word. You, woman, remain with me."

"Yis, ma'm." And the pseudo-apple-woman made an awe-stricken courtesy as Liz disappeared.

"You call yourself Norah, you say?"

"Indade an' its mesel' as does, ma'm, an' it isn't often that I'm called out av me name, aither, widout a black eye or a broken head follyin' the same, ma'm, Lord love your purty face!"

"Be silent, and dare not to trifle with me!"

"Thrifle, is it, an' wid the loikes of ye, ma'm? Och, an' if I t'ought—"

"Be silent! Have you a home?"

"Sech as it is, ma'm. A broth av a cubby hole in Morrisania, wid two cheers, a bit av a shtove, an' a fedder-bed av me own, but it's the divil av a bit av rint I'm afther payin' for the tree month's, an' the landlord, bad 'cess to him! abusin' me like a thafe day in an' day out!"

"Are you alone in the world—no family, no friends?"

"Divil a fambly, divil a fri'nd!" And Norah wiped the corner of her eye.

"Would you like to serve me?"

"W'u'd I? Whoop! By the powers—"

"Remain quiet and respectful, or it will be the worse for you. I will think the matter over. Go into the kitchen now, and see if you can find something to eat. Wait. If a rough man, calling himself Job, should present himself, tell the girl Liz to bring me word."

"Yes, ma'm; long life to you, ma'm!"

Left alone with her "patient," as Evelyn might be called, the clairvoyante bent over him, intently gazing into his face.

"Are you conscious?" she whispered in his ear. "Are you aware of what is going on around you? If so, I beg you to make me some sign."

He heard and comprehended distinctly, but made no sign—not so much as the flutter of an eyelid.

"Strange!" he heard her mutter to herself. "The drug must have worked oddly, or there would be some glimmering of consciousness, in spite of the apparent torpor. Ha! what if he should be shamming?"

The thought seemed to be a terrifying one, for he heard her catch her breath, and then pause, as if reflecting deeply.

His next sensation was of a more painful character.

It was that of a pin being thrust slowly, and quite up to the head, into one of his wrists.

He understood it as a test, and withstood it without moving a fiber, though the pain was great.

"Still, if counterfeiting is being practiced," he heard her murmur next, "I must try a more effective test. A red-hot iron applied to one of the finger-nails would answer."

She started toward the door, but Evelyn understood it as a mere feint for the trapping of some sign of consciousness on his part, and was as wary as before.

His next sensation was yet more painful, because more repugnant; for now, apparently satisfied of the genuineness of his insensibility, she resumed her seat at his side, and indulged in furtive endearments, such as pressing his hands and smoothing his forehead, while giving vent to low, sometimes heart-broken sighs.

"Ah, why do I love?" she murmured.

"Why has the tender passion made itself a home at last within my adamant nature? But it is so. My bosom, never prompted before save to thoughts of remorselessness and crime, is now the abode of passionate longings and tenderness. Oh, Evelyn! my one, my only love, in all the universe of rage and hate! canst thou not hear me? Do not the voices of my love awake a single echo in thy noble heart? If I bring thee back to life at last, shall it be to reward me with thy responsive love, or but to overwhelm and blast me with thy slow-returning scorn?"

The breath of her warm kisses swept his brow and lips, little deeming of the internal shudders and loathing which they inspired.

Her sighs were now mingled with tears, that fell upon his face, and with low sobs, that would have been melodious and delicious to a responsive heart.

She might have even thrown herself upon that adored but unconscious, or at least unap-

preciative, breast, but at that moment there was an unlooked-for interruption.

She was torn aside, as with a frenzied grip.

The pseudo-apple-woman had returned, unannounced, and it was to her jealous clutch that madame was indebted for the unlooked-for interruption.

The clairvoyante could at first scarcely credit the evidence of her senses; then she whitened with rage.

"Wretch! hag! how dare you?" was all she could exclaim.

Waifa, though still a prey to secret indignation, had by this time recovered the dissimulation necessary to her role.

"Sure, ma'm, Jobber, the mon ye warned me agin', has come intil the kitchen!" said she, with a pretense of being awfully frightened. "Didn't yez tell me to come and fetch yez to him?"

It was also with the utmost difficulty that Madame Estrella mastered her resentment; and added to this—perhaps fortunately for the intruder—was a natural feeling of shame-facedness, inherent to the nature of the interruption.

"No, I didn't," was her angry response. "And hark you, hag, if you ever venture to repeat such an intrusion, it will be at your peril! Know that, were I so minded, I could rend you in twain by a single wrench of these hands of mine. Come with me, and take heed in the future!"

The disguised Waifa followed her obediently out of the room, though not without a furtively lingering look at the motionless figure on the couch; and, having reached the kitchen at madame's heels, where Job Mixer was in waiting, she was summarily dismissed to an adjoining scullery.

Madame made a motion for Job to approach her, and then slightly staggered, passing one hand over her eyes, and with the other supporting herself against a table.

"Oh, ma'm! what's up with yer?" said the tramp, with humble solicitude. "It's pale an' droopin' that you are."

She was, indeed, nearly worn out with excitement and want of sleep, though she made a gesture of deprecation.

"It is nothing—it will pass," said she, faintly; and then something of her old power returned. "Speak low," she went on. "I know that you performed my bidding well. You led those interlopers straight into the Deep One's toils."

Job chuckled.

"Yes, ma'm; I'll tell you all about it," he was saying, when she silenced him.

"Do you imagine I don't know what chanced—that I did not see it all?" said she, impatiently. "Here is for your fidelity." She handed him some money. "The gentleman whom you might have entrapped to his death is now in this house—more securely immeshed than if your Deep One himself had twined him irrevocably in his octopian coils—his young companion, the work-girl detective in disguise, lies on a deserted dock, dead or dying from a policeman's stalwart handiwork. You will remain about the house on vigilant watch. If Clape returns, bid him await my waking, but keep himself secreted. There is a new woman here—the one you just saw. Keep a lookout upon her, until I can be sure of her fidelity. Give entrance to no one, and do not let me be disturbed unless there should be imminent danger. That will do. Stay—the cellar stairway. Call up Liz and Melinda. But wait; I hear them coming."

The door of a narrow flight of steps leading down from a corner of the kitchen at this moment opened, and Newspaper Liz made her appearance.

"Where is Melinda?" asked madame.

"Gone to bed, ma'm."

"Then her patient must have quieted. Did Melinda say so?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Then you attend me to my chamber. I may require a cigarette or two before sleeping. Job, be faithful."

"Don't fear for me, ma'm," said Job, cheerfully; though as madame was quitting the kitchen, with Liz obediently at her heels, his eyes rested on the back of her comely head with a scowling and suspicious look that it was well for him she could not see. "I'm faithful to them as treats me square." And he sidled toward the little scullery in which the sham apple-woman was disconsolately waiting.

As for the clairvoyante, she only paused in the basement passage to double-lock the door leading into Evelyn's prison, putting the key in her pocket, and then went on to her room, with the wide-awake Liz as her handmaiden.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAIFA TO THE RESCUE.

A FEW alterations in the red-and-gold room, at the girl's hands, by this time experienced in such touches, transformed it into as luxurious a boudoir-bedchamber as the heart of the most pampered favorite of wealth and fashion could desire.

As madame disrobed before her mirror, with a good-night cigarette between her handsome lips, there was a preoccupied look in her face, and she looked every hour of her age, which

closely crowded the summer verge of forty, if it was a day.

"Mix me a glass of sal-volatile, child," said she at last; and, having finished her *toilette de nuit*, she drew a loose woollen wrap over magnificent shoulders, and sunk into a seat by the fire with her head on her hand. "That will do." She took the drink that had been prepared. "You may go to bed now. But stop. Tell Job that if Clape shouldn't return within half an hour, I am not to be disturbed. Good-night!"

As Liz was quitting the room, the little ormolu clock in the adjoining room rung out the hour of five in the morning.

"So late, so late!" murmured the clairvoyante.

"And yet, exhausted as I am, I should not venture to sleep until sure of the fresh environments—that is, if I could only conjure my second-sight once more."

Impostor or not, it was at any rate evident that the strange being thoroughly believed in her own possession of the vaunted gift.

After drinking the sal-volatile, she threw herself back in her chair, leaving her superbly statuesque figure wholly inert, and seemed to be doing her best to woo a visitation of the clairvoyante conditions.

But it was in vain.

"Too late, too late, for the time being at least!" she at last murmured, opening her eyes. "The mood will not be tempted. Common nature must be restored by slumber, before its interior gifts can again resume their power. How sad, too. There is much I would like to inquire into first, especially with regard to the fidelity of this Norah, who may be less brutal and honest than she seems. Then I should also assure myself as to the death or powerlessness of Waifa, or all this new sweet venture—this bold throw for the prize of George Evelyn's heart—may recoil upon me. I almost dread to sleep, with these elements in uncertainty. And yet—there is no help for it."

She was about to seek her couch when a stumbling step on the stair arrested her intention.

Then Clape put in an appearance, looking angry and somewhat the worse for wear.

Madame looked at him with unmitigated disgust.

"Is it in this way," she sneered, "that you take care of yourself, with perhaps the hounds of justice on your track?"

"Keep your temper, Delia. What way do you refer to?"

"You are drunk—as usual."

"I am not."

A contemptuous gesture from her.

"Well, what if I am, then?" he went on. "Evelyn won't run me down. You've taken care of that. You didn't really suppose I was off to Canada, did you?"

"Not I."

An eager look came into his flushed face. He advanced a step nearer.

"You had the seance with Evelyn?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ha! how did it end?"

"He is an occupant of the basement strong-room, helpless and unconscious."

As much fiendish exultation as his mediocre features were capable of came into them.

His hands worked as if closing around the handles of deadly weapons, and he started to retrace his steps.

"Stay where you are," said madame, contemptuously. "Where would you go?"

"Can you ask? To kill him while he is helpless in our power!"

"You?"

"Curse it, yes! Haven't I been praying for the opportunity? He is my rival! But for him, Waifa's heart would ere this have been mine!"

She seemed to be studying him curiously, as a demoniac master mind would inspect a sort of vicious insect in the realm of iniquity.

"Don't be a fool, William Clape," said she, coldly. "There is a train by daybreak. Prepare to take it for *you know where*."

"What! And leave my rival here uninjured?"

"Yes. Do you imagine I would leave him—a dish fit for the gods—for such poor, cheap hands as yours to deal with?"

"Still—"

She silenced him with a yet more contemptuous gesture.

"You would speak of the girl, Waifa?"

"Yes."

"Comfort yourself with this assurance. If alive, within less than a week she shall share your retirement."

"Ha! You promise that?"

"Yes."

Then a sudden doubt came into his face.

"Still, you say *if alive*."

"What of that?"

But she could not avoid associating the words with a terrible smile.

His demeanor also changed.

"Woman, speak!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"You have not killed her? By Heaven! Delia, if I thought that possible—"

"You are a fool!" said she. "You shall then have my assurance, unconditionally. The girl

shall be in your power within a week. Now will you follow my orders unquestioningly?"

"Yes."

And he quitted the room without another word.

Then madame went to bed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SECRET INTERVIEW.

"GEORGE, my love, my life! Do you not know me? Can you not make one little sign of recognition for me?"

The voice was Waifa's. It penetrated to the drug-tranced Evelyn's inmost consciousness, and yet, save for a faint fluttering of his eyelids, he was incapable of a response.

Did he recognize that voice?

"Ay, and if aught in the universe could rouse him from that death-in-life torpor, those beloved accents would have done so where the sounding trump of the recording angel would have fallen mute upon insensate ears.

For more than two hours had he been lying thus, and for nearly an hour had the devoted girl, after passing the locked barrier by secret means, sought in vain to obtain some visible sign.

"He cannot answer," she moaned, despairingly, and not for the first time. "Oh, perhaps the drug has wrought even more powerfully than its fiendish giver had intended. Perhaps he will wake no more, no more!"

Then, for the twentieth time, she seized his hand, covering it with kisses.

Did she dream, or was that a pressure of those cold fingers? Yes; she was certain of it. The pressure was repeated, feebly, but unmistakably, and expiring hope was once more kindled in her desolated breast.

In a few minutes he was able to answer yes or no in this manner to her questions.

She was not long in ascertaining that he was alert and conscious to all that was passing, but incapable of speech or movement, as in those painful cases of suspended animation where unfortunate individuals are in danger of being buried alive, without so much as a protesting syllable or a slight tap upon the interior of the coffin-lid being vouchsafed them.

But at last the finger-pressures grew stronger and more intelligent, till she suddenly realized that he was trying to communicate by the sign alphabet familiar to both.

"I cannot tell by the touch," said she. "But now tell me what you would say."

She held up his fingers to the light.

At first their signs were unintelligible. Then there was a nervous quiver, followed by a pause, after which the words, "An antidote," were slowly spelled out.

She gave a cry of joy.

"Shall I go for a physician?"

"No!" this time decidedly.

"What shall I do? Speak, my darling! Can you suggest an antidote?"

"Yes; wait while I think."

Then, a moment later, these words followed, slowly, but distinctly:

"Ammonia first; then warm salt water, and plenty of it."

She pressed her lips to his forehead, and hurrying back to Job in the kitchen, presently returned with the articles demanded.

The sufferer's intuition had not been at fault; the effects of the simple antidotes were soon made apparent.

After repeated inhalations of the hartshorn, Evelyn gradually recovered the power of speech and motion; then copious draughts of the lukewarm brine acted as an emetic, and he was presently able to sit up, though still greatly shocked and enervated.

His first use of his partial recovery was to clutch both of the young girl's hands in his.

"You are with me again at last!" he gasped. "Leave me not again!"

She embraced him tenderly.

"Never again!" she murmured. "Oh, my love, my life! let us hope that we are together to part no more!"

Then she gave him a swallow of cold lemonade, with a drop of ammonia in it, and his condition was perceptibly improved.

"Where is madame?" was his first question.

"Sound asleep in bed," was the reply. "It is now nearly daybreak. She retired in such a state of complete exhaustion that Liz is sure she will sleep for many hours. And then she told him of her own presence in the house, and how fortunately it had come about.

"This may turn out the best thing that could have befallen," said Evelyn. "But do you continue to think Job true to us?"

"I do; notwithstanding that he led us into the Deep One's ambush at Madame Estrella's express instance. He confesses it to me."

"Ha! then our first instincts were right. There is really some intimate connection between this dreadful woman and our arch-enemy—the Deep One?"

"Job is sure of it, though exactly what sort of connection he does not know, or even guess."

"If you tell me truly as to his having purposely led us into the Deep One's ambush, how can he have been faithful to us?"

"He could not warn beforehand, it would seem, but his narrow escape from instant death in our service should testify to his fidelity."

"True."

"And the man, as he explains to me, is necessarily playing a double game as between madame and the Deep One."

"True; but what can have been the clairvoyante's motive in reducing me to this helpless condition?"

"What! can you not see it?"

"No; but then my brain is still more or less confused."

"Her motive! Why, she honors you with her tigrish love, which you of course do not reciprocate!"

"I forgot—now I remember everything! Oh!" And he clinched his hands, fairly grinding his teeth. "But patience, dear heart! our day will come."

"It is almost at hand," said Waifa, hopefully. "I feel it!"

"Where are you going?"

She had risen from her seat by the side of the couch, and was adjusting her old woman's disguise.

"Can you not guess? To seek the longed-for interview with the mysterious ma'mselle—the Justine, or Madame Alceste, of my past history."

"Should not I go with you?" And he made an effort to stand on his feet, but fell back on the edge of the bed.

"You are still too weak from the effects of that poison. It will wear off in time. Besides, it is best that you should counterfeit utter helplessness in your present state. If we remain together, unsuspected, for twenty-four hours, it will not be overlong."

"I see that you are right." And Evelyn, passing his hand over his brow, again stretched himself out at full length. "A spell of natural sleep now might fully restore me."

"I am sure of it."

"But you yourself are not made of iron. You, too, must be exhausted."

"I do not feel it. I am not only of iron, but fibered with steel, in this mighty quest."

"Are you sure everything is propitious for your visit to the cellar captive?"

"Yes. Madame sleeps the sleep of exhaustion in her magnificent chamber; Liz is alert to my summons, though also asleep, in another basement bedroom adjoining this one; and the girl Melinda slumbers at her post—somewhere down there near the unfortunate prisoner she is specially hired to guard. Besides yourself, Job and I are alone awake in the house. Even Clape has fled finally; I heard him slip out with his valise an hour ago, after a somewhat stormy interview with madame, which was overheard and reported to me."

"Clape, you say? I deemed him on his way to Canada."

"So did I, but it was never madame's intention that he should go there."

"Treachery upon treachery!"

"Yes; but we will circumvent it all. Good rest to thee now, my own heart's love. I hope to have good news for your awakening."

She kissed his eyelids, and then, as he seemed about to sleep, slipped out of the room, locking the door behind her with the duplicate key with which she had been provided.

The basement passage, in which she found herself, was dimly lighted by the early morning light.

"Now for the cellar!" said Waifa, half to herself, and she crossed the bottom of the staircase leading to the hall above.

"You'll never enter it, save as a corpse!" sounded, like an articulated serpent's hiss, in her ear.

Simultaneously she was dashed to the floor, and, looking up, she found herself in the clairvoyante's irresistible clutch.

Madame was in her night robe, the rich dressing-gown, which she had hastily assumed, having fallen from her gleaming, partly bare shoulders; her hair was disheveled, her eyes burning and her features distorted with inextinguishable hate.

"Oh, you wretch!" she gasped. "To think that you deceived me by the cunning of your disguise. But fortunately I suspected you in my first sleep, and the very dream of it awoke me. And so you have been in that room, gloating your eyes upon your unconscious lover? Come; there must be short work with you!"

Waifa, even in this extremity could still gather hope from the woman's infuriated words, since it was evident from them that her conversation with Evelyn had not been overheard, nor even his return to consciousness so much as suspected.

The next instant she was dragged into the kitchen, being no more than a doll in the tremendous grasp of the clairvoyante.

"Here, Job, you rascal!" exclaimed madame, still almost inarticulate with fury: "here is your precious old apple-woman—Waifa Target in disguise! What have you to say for yourself?"

Job, who had been drowsing by the hot stove, took in the situation at a glance, but simulated an immense amazement.

"Holy smoke! who'd have thunk it?" he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes.

"Bring me my dressing-gown," said madame, suddenly realizing the unseemliness of her appearance. "It fell off me in the passage."

As she was putting on the garment, a moment later, the pseudo-apple-woman made a vigorous and undaunted movement to escape, but was again pounced upon, and reduced to helplessness in short order.

"You enemy! you scorpion!" snarled her captor; "I've a notion to throw you across those red hot stove-lids, and let you grill and roast there!"

But she, nevertheless, contented herself with securing her prisoner hand and foot with a stout clothesline, and then tossing her a helpless bundle in a near-at-hand corner.

"Why don't you say something, wretch?" cried the infuriated woman, still hovering over her captive. "Speak, or I'll tear out your tongue!"

Waifa's only reply was to laugh in her face.

Then as madame, grinding her teeth, began to vent her fury afresh upon Job Mixer, the latter did not hesitate to defend himself stoutly.

"What had I to do, ma'm, with fetchin' the gal in here?" said he. "If you was deceived by the cunnin'ness of her outlandish make-up, what better could you expect of me? I ain't no lynx-eyed orgus, let me tell yer. I didn't interdooce the spy inter the camp."

"Ha! but Liz did. Summon her hither."

"But this is all nonsents, ma'm. How could Liz have knowed any better nor you an' me? Best study up some plan of gettin' rid of the gal on the quiet, an' without any risk to yourself, ma'm." Here he exchanged an intelligent glance with Waifa. "There's them disreputable foreign bootblacks next door, for instance, what you once had trouble with on Merlinder's account. For a little money, they'd be glad enough to take keer of this p'izen cat, or to kill her either, for that matter, an' I'm bettin' on it."

Madame Estrella seemed to snatch at the idea favorably.

"Go after them," said she, abruptly. "But stay. Try to bring that rascal calling himself Antonio, who tried to make love to the mulatto. His face would hang him anywhere—it argued a capacity for any crime, even the worst, with murder to top it." She threw at Waifa a look whose fiendish malice and suggestiveness seemed to make the poor girl's blood run cold. "Yes, yes; the very thing. Lose no time. I will in the mean time take a look into the cellar."

Job hurriedly departed upon his errand, and madame, after examining her captive's bonds, and satisfying herself that they were secure, descended into the cellar, doubtless to likewise assure herself of the security of her prisoner in that region.

She was gone but a few minutes, and on her return was met by Job, who had just re-entered the kitchen accompanied by a rather good-looking Italian-appearing young man, who was, however, sufficiently suggestive of dirt and desperation, one would have thought.

"You are not Antonio!" said madame, as soon as she clapped eyes on him.

The new-comer scraped his foot and laughed softly, with a hand-dog light peering up from under his bushy eyebrows and shock of jet-black curling hair, while he swayed his slouch-hat diffidently in one hand, the other being engaged in scratching his head.

"No, signorina, me no Antonio," he replied, in a musically villainous voice. "Me Antonio's brother. Me Beppo. Antonio locked up for stabbing young gal. Me more good than Antonio." Here he produced a murderous-looking stiletto, and began softly whetting its blade on his ragged sleeve. "Me like stilettos, me like troublesome gals, me like money, too, just like Antonio. Me no afraid of police, either. Let signorina pay, let signorina explain, me then signorina's slave."

He returned the knife to its place of concealment, and stretched out his palm suggestively.

Madame smiled; in fact, her good-humor had almost returned.

"I think you will do," said she, dropping some coins into the extended palm. "Serve me secretly, faithfully, and you shall be well paid. My man Job, here, has doubtless already told you what is expected. You will keep the young woman a close prisoner in one of your dens until you get word again from me. The streets are still deserted. With Job's assistance you can convey her next door without being perceived. She is bound. If she screams, gag her; if she seems likely to escape, kill her."

The obliging Beppo had already pocketed the coins with a leer, and he was now rubbing his paws softly together.

"Yes, signorina," he murmured. "Me understand, me secret, me faithful. Now for the little gal, now for the prisoner, signorina."

"Certainly," said madame, turning toward the corner in which she had thrown her helpless captive. "You will not be over-gentle I hope, and—"

She staggered back with a hoarse, baffled cry.

The captive maiden had unaccountably disap-

peared. The coil of rope that had bound her was lying heaped in the corner, but the sham apple-woman whom it had twined and knotted so securely had melted into the air.

"Gone, gone!" gasped the clairvoyante. "Quick, pursue, chase—"

She could say no more, but fell into a half-faint, being supported to a chair by Newspaper Liz, who at that moment came hurrying into the room.

"She has again escaped me!" exclaimed madame in a faint, exhausted voice. "Job, remain here. If you can make use of this young man, keep him with you. Liz, help me to my room."

The two men were no sooner left alone in the kitchen than the Italian-appearing personage sprang toward the cellar stair with an exultant bound.

It will have been perceived that this person was none other than the work-girl detective in yet another of her clever disguises.

"Now for the mysterious captive of the subterranean prison!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MELINDA.

NOTWITHSTANDING her apparent prostration, Madame Estrella did not neglect, on her way to the upper part of the house, to look in upon Evelyn.

He did not seem to have stirred from the rigid, death-like attitude in which she had left him—indeed, he was now really unconscious, the deep sleep of exhaustion having followed the reaction from the paralyzing effects of the drug—and, satisfied in her own mind that the poison still held him in its chains, she continued on her way.

"How did Waifa obtain entrance into that room?" she asked of her companion, after getting into her luxurious bed. "Is there a duplicate key?"

"Please, ma'm, I don't know."

"Oh, you are very innocent! And do you tell me that you hadn't recognized your former patroness, Waifa Target, in the apple-woman make-up from the first?"

"Me, ma'm?" Liz's eyes opened to their fullest capacity. "Lord love, save an' bless you, Madame Estrella, whatever sort of a double, back-action, forty-horse-power magnifyin' glass do you take me for? I was that parrurlyzed by the revvylation you could have knocked me down with a feather duster!"

"Were you, indeed? Well, I may have a lively understanding with you, when less dead for want of sleep than just now. In the mean time, you are not to quit my bedside for an instant—you are to remain just where you are, without stirring. Do you understand me?"

Liz bowed her head with becoming humility, for the clairvoyante's terrible eyes, albeit growing somewhat hazy, were upon her.

"I allers obey orders from you, ma'm, strickly an' everlastin'ly," said she, resignedly. "Not dynamite torpeders nor Gatlin' gun skyrockets could fire me out of this cheer, arter me receivin' such orders from you, ma'm."

Nevertheless, the terrible eyes were no sooner indubitably impressed by slumber's dewy seal before this paragon of propriety and obedience hopped off her seat with cricket-like cheeriness, and after treating herself to one of madame's prime cigarettes, danced away toward the basement, blowing a cloud as she ran.

"Where's the Eyetalian!" she demanded of Job Mixer, on entering the kitchen.

He pointed to the cellar staircase with a warning gesture.

"Hush!" said he, in a hoarse whisper. "You're to keep guard in the passage. The young leddy said so. It won't do for madame to sneak in on us again."

"No danger of that, at least in a hurry," said Liz, nevertheless preparing to obey orders. "Madame's tighter to sleep than a drum's head in a garret."

"You can't ever count on her," said Job. "She kin mostly wake when she pleases, though this time I don't believe she's had a square sleep for three days."

To return to Waifa in her new disguise, upon descending into the cellar, she found it, much to her surprise, nicely lighted and warmed; the part in which she found herself being ceiled, floored and walled, and apparently as dry and comfortable, barring the mere consciousness of being underground, as the rooms immediately over it.

A small room, out of which a gaslight was flinging its rays through the open door, served as a sort of antechamber to a much larger room, taking up one entire end of the cellar, which the work-girl detective rightly decided to be the prison chamber of the mysterious ma'mselle.

She softly entered the smaller room.

The closed door between it and the interior one was a solid-looking barrier, but there was a small wicker in it, partly ajar.

Fully dressed, but apparently worn out with unusual vigils, the warden of the secret captive, Melinda, the mulatto girl, lay fast asleep on a narrow couch posted directly across this communicating door, so that, to avail oneself of the entrance, even had there been no barrier, one

would have had to step across her sleeping form and the frame it occupied.

The intruder bent a searching gaze upon the sleeper's face, which was upturned to the light, her head being gracefully pillowed on her arm.

It was the face of a comely young woman of twenty-two or three, symmetrically but strongly-proportioned—a bold, fearless, and yet secretive face.

Waifa had already decided on her cue with regard to the girl.

After surveying her Italian make-up with a critical look, she bent forward, and whispered in the sleeper's ear.

The girl started into a sitting posture, but less with alarm than surprise, and rubbed her eyes.

"Who are you?" said she.

"I am Beppo."

"Beppo? The name is strange. I never saw or heard of you before."

"True. But you have heard of Antonio?"

A passionate look, but not altogether a pleasant one, leaped into her dark face.

"Antonio! Yes, I know Antonio. What then?"

"I am Beppo, his brother."

"He did have a brother somewhere, I believe. He once told me so. But what is this to me? I hate Antonio! Antonio is a traitor!"

"What would you think of my saying that he sent me here—that he loves you?"

"It is false! He loves another girl—a white girl, though with skin no fairer than mine. Curse them both! He has deserted me for her, and yet he swore that he would marry me!"

"Do not doubt him. He is in jail."

"In jail! What for?"

"For stabbing a young woman—doubtless your rival. Can you doubt him now?"

"I don't know what to think. Still, I am sorry Antonio is in jail. Are you sure he sent you to me, and with his love?"

"Can you doubt it? Else why am I here?"

"I don't know, though your being here is strange enough. How did you steal down here through madame's house?"

"How did Antonio ever steal down here, with you for his attraction? Come, you won't attempt to deny his having visited and made good, honest love to you down here?" The girl's dusky face flushed, and she lowered her eyes.

"But that is all right. None is the wiser for it, and it will be pleasant to laugh about when you are my brother's wife. Now you can guess how I managed it. Job is no less my friend than Antonio, and Antonio might have easily given me the cue."

"Still, you run an awful risk. Madame would kill you, if she knew. Even Antonio was afraid of madame."

"Well, I'm not. Besides, there is no risk. Madame is asleep."

"No matter," said the girl, with an alarmed look. "Madame is awful, even when asleep. She has a double pair of eyes—one pair behind the other—ghost eyes!"

"Do you love madame?"

"I am afraid of madame."

"I ask, do you love her?"

"Do we love where we fear?"

"Do you hate madame?"

"Yes"—in a low voice, accompanied by a frightened look.

"Do you love Antonio?"

"I don't know. I wish he wasn't so deceiving."

"How can you still believe that, when I am his messenger to you?"

"But you haven't told me why he sent you. Are you sure he sends me his love?"

"What a question, when he has once seen and loved you!"

"What more did he say?"

"You are to do me a special favor, and all for Antonio's sake."

"I—I feel I would do anything for Antonio's sake. What is it?"

The pseudo Italian pointed to the prison door.

"You are to let me confer with the prisoner in there."

The girl started to her feet in a sort of panic. As she did so, she drew a small revolver, which she cocked.

"You are crazy!" she exclaimed. "Antonio could never have expected such a favor, even in his own person. No one enters that room save over my dead body!"

"No one?"

"Only madame."

"How terribly afraid of madame you must be."

"I don't deny it, young man, I am afraid of both."

"Of both?"

"Yes; of the witch within there, no less than of madame herself."

"Ah! no doubt that between the two witches you are tightly bound."

"You wouldn't sneer if you could know more—if you could see the devil-cards in ma'mselle's hands, hear her converse with spirits, and see the witch-sparks dancing in her green eyes. You would be frightened, too."

Here was something to go on at last, though all had been vague enough before, and the

work-girl detective was not slow to take advantage of it.

"True," he said, musingly. "Antonio told me to expect that."

"How did he know? Antonio never saw ma'mselle."

"No; but he knows her by reputation from you. He knows of her talks with evil spirits, and all her power."

"Yes, he may have heard something from me."

"Well, let it pass. Of course, I can't see ma'mselle without your permission, and I suppose my poor brother will have to hang."

"What! will they hang Antonio?"

"Undoubtedly, without the interference of old ma'mselle, the witch, to save him."

"Are you sure she can save him?"

"Yes."

"But I don't understand."

"Like enough you don't; neither do I exactly. But Antonio does. He has had experience with other witches—sisters of this one, for all witches are more or less related to one another, as you must know."

"Yes; or at least it seems reasonable that they should be."

"Well, Antonio knows of a certain spell which, worked out by this witch, ma'mselle, will not only save him from the gallows, but send him straight out of prison, so that he can marry you without delay. But never mind. It is evident that even you, whom he loves better than his heart's blood, must push him along. My poor brother! unhappy Antonio! nothing is left—he must be hanged!"

Apparently overcome by his emotions, the counterfeit Italian sunk into a seat, and buried his face in his hands, large tears forcing their way through his fingers.

A trembling hand laid upon his shoulder caused him to look up.

The mulatto girl was standing there, the pistol no longer sight, a world of troublous hesitation in her face and eyes.

"What is the spell that ma'mselle can work to save my lover's life? Tell me."

"Ha! you are moved to pity, then? You will hearken to his prayer?"

"I don't know. But tell me."

Waifa drew a long thin tress of woman's hair from her bosom (she had just plucked it surreptitiously from her own head, by reaching under her wig while pretending to weep,) and laid it across the palm of her left hand.

"See," said she, solemnly. "These hairs Antonio gave to me. They are from the head of the young woman he stabbed, and who now lies at the point of death. You are to bend your lips over these hairs, and breathe silently two of the deadliest, most venomous curses on their owner."

"I'll do that with my whole heart!"

"Do so."

The girl obeyed, her features meanwhile working with superstitious hate and fear.

"That will do. Now all ma'mselle has to do, after consulting the cards, is to mutter her incantation over these same hairs. With what result? The stabbed girl will immediately mend so rapidly that she will be impelled to swear that she inflicted the wound upon herself, and so Antonio will be set at liberty."

"Yes, to return to her again! I won't trust him. Besides, I don't want her to get well. I want her to die!"

"Softly, softly! You breathed two curses, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Well, what I have stated will merely be the outcome of the first of your witch-governed curses."

"Is that so?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Perhaps not. But what of the second curse?"

"Its venom will be more subtle and deadly. On the very day of Antonio's release, all the wounded young woman's hair will begin to drop off. In less than a week she will be as bald as an egg."

"Come, I like that."

"I was sure you would. Next the poor woman's teeth will take to loosening and falling out, and so continue till not one is left in her gums. Then scrofula will assail her skin, rheumatism twist her bones, and a strange disease effect her sight and hearing; until in less than a year the miserable creature will be so deaf, dumb, blind, bald, toothless, disfigured and misshapen that not only shall such a handsome chap as Antonio loathe the sight of her, but she will have become a human scarecrow for all mankind to shun. Still, as she will not die at once, and nothing else than her death must content you—"

"Never mind about that now. Such a fate for the bussy is, perhaps, even pleasanter to think of than death itself."

"I should say so!"

"If I were only sure that ma'mselle's witch-work with those hairs would do all that!"

"Can you doubt it, still? Besides, the trial need only to be made."

"Swear that you will do ma'mselle no harm, if I let you talk with her."

"I swear it."

"Sha'n't I be present?"

"Impossible! it would spoil the charm. On the contrary, you must keep watch and ward out yonder at the foot of the stairs, for ma'mselle's incantation may take up the best part of an hour. You must not even overhear a syllable that passes between us, or all is lost. Quick, now!"

After a moment of hesitation, which seemed an agonizing one, Melinda suddenly drew away the couch, handed over the prison door-key, and darted away to the foot of the stairs.

Trembling with eagerness, but not without many a secret qualm over the systematic though necessary mendacity by which the longed-for end had been secured, Waifa fitted the key into the door.

It opened, and she stepped into the room, taking the precaution to close the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"MA'MSELLE."

An excellent, neatly-furnished bedroom, cosily warmed by a small open stove, with one grated window high from the floor as the only prison suggestion of the place, while in one part the wall seemed of double thickness, for exactly what purpose it would have been difficult to guess.

Such was the interior of the strong room in which Waifa found herself.

It was lighted by a single gas-jet suspended from the ceiling, directly under which was a small table, at which the mysterious inmate sat, slowly shuffling a pack of cards, though with a suspicious suggestion of having hastily snatched them up as an occupation in readiness for the intrusion, of which the turning of the key in the lock had afforded sufficient warning.

One glance at the worn, pathetic figure was enough for Waifa.

With a single bound, she was on her knees at the captive's feet.

"Don't you know—don't you remember me?" she exclaimed, in a low, intense voice. "Madame Alceste, look—I am here to save you!"

At the mention of the name, the woman gave a start of surprise, but that was all; nor were the sad, unrecognizing eyes altogether vacant as they slowly, doubtfully searched the eager questioner's face.

"I do not know you," she at last replied, with a queer little laugh—a laugh that caused Waifa a fresh shock of discouragement, it was so suggestive of a mind disordered, if not already overthrown. "No, no," she shook her head; "you seem to know me—you call me by a name that I once bore—but I do not know you."

"But recall the time when you did bear that name. Don't you remember Wormser and Waifa—the melancholy little Waifa whom you so loved, whom you gave French lessons to—who more than once knew that you stole to her bedside at night, to kiss and embrace her while you thought her fast asleep?"

A flickering light of intelligence sprang into the prisoner's eyes.

"Waifa! Waifa!" she repeated wildly. "What of her?"

"Alas! do you not see that I am Waifa?"

Ma'mselle grew angry.

"You are a fool!" she cried. "Get out of here, or I shall call madame, and madame will kill you! Waifa was a beautiful girl—you are an ugly young man!"

In her excitement, Waifa had forgotten her disguise.

A commode, with water in a bowl, and toilette conveniences, was within reach of her hand.

In an instant, and without rising from her kneeling attitude, she had torn off her short, curling black wig and erased the disguising duskiness of her complexion.

The fair beauty of her face was thus revealed, even the superb maidenliness of her bright hair, accidentally loosened from its cramped confinement, showering down over her shoulders and back in rippling splendor.

"Now do you know me?"

And the sweet face, thus wonderfully transformed, was again upturned for inspection.

She had just time to place her hand over the prisoner's lips to modify the great cry of delighted astonishment that would otherwise have burst from them.

"Waifa! Waifa! my own child! my little girl!"

And then she was folded in the clinging arms, while warm tears were raining upon her face.

"Do I know thee, my child?" continued Madame Alceste, wildly. "Ah! could I ever forget thee? My own, my beautiful! But wait—Ha! what is this?"

A terrified look—the returning look of insanity—flickered back into her face and eyes.

"Shots and murderous shouts are ringing around the little house on the prairie! Ha! they will be killed—both Wormser and my little Waifa will be killed! The fiendish thirster for her precious blood is again upon her devoted track. Fiend-pursuer, devil in human shape, avaunt!"

It was obvious that she was living over once

again that dreadful night of terror and attack in the lonely Nebraska farm-house.

Waifa waited for more expressions of the insane illusion with intense interest.

"Quick! let me dress myself," continued Madame Alceste, still the cheat of her own ravings. "I must get down into the lower rooms before they are both murdered. There, there! But what is this? My window is forced—a terrible shape enters to me. Demoness, avaunt! No, no; I will not go with thee. Now that I have found her again, I will never, never separate from my child, my hunted darling, any more. What do you whisper, demoness? Is there then no alternative? Must my Waifa surely be slain if I go not away with you? Oh, cruel, bitter alternative! Would you destroy me as you destroyed the nurse? Oh, pity, pity!"

She was wringing her hands. It was evident that the re-enactment of the dreadful scene was agonizingly real in her diseased imagination.

"What, you promise me that?" she went on, eagerly, after a painful pause, in which she had seemed to be intently listening to fancied words on the part of the torturing presence. "You swear that if I desert her and go off with you now, you will never, never haunt, threaten, molest or trouble her any more? Yes, you swear it, but, sorceress! demoness! how often have you made such an oath to me, only to break it? Oh, what more can you want, that you would still pursue her life so relentlessly? Is not the vast estate already virtually yours? Have I not signed over everything to insure her against your diabolical thirst for her life? Is not she weak and poor, as well as I? No one can guess her identity with the heiress of the great Farmington possessions. What is that? She may one day come to a knowledge of it, find friends, and step between you and the wealth. But have I not sworn to you that she shall never know, that she shall remain in obscurity forever, if you will only spare her? Ha! are you then pitiless? Must I go with you now? Come, then, I will go; but remember your oath. Quick! help me out of the casement! Call off your hell-hounds below there, ere it be too late—ere both the good Wormser and my child be slain! There, there!"

She ceased, pallid and quivering, a saner but still wandering light coming slowly back into her eyes as the vision of the past became less palpable and distinct.

Waifa had drank in the semi-revelations of those frenzied words with a wondering eagerness that can better be imagined than described.

"What is this that you lead me to infer, Madame Alceste?" she exclaimed. "See, the fearful phantasm is past, and you are only here with me, your beloved Waifa. But tell me more, or I shall die of suspense! You still recognize me, do you not?"

But the poor woman only took the fair young head between her hands, moaning out in a lost, bewildered way: "Yes, it is the beautiful Waifa come back to me. But hush, say nothing, lest you cause the sweet face to fade away again. Ah, the cards, the cards! They may tell me of the future." And she fell once more to shuffling the pack, in a weak, aimless way.

Waifa was almost in despair.

It was only too clear from the prisoner's manner that the cards were both a refuge and a ruse—an indication, not only of madness, but also of a method therein—inasmuch as they served, in the one case, as a species of solitary amusement, and, in the other, as a cunning disguise of perhaps frequent sane intervals, for the mystification of her jailers, perhaps in the secret fostering of a hope to one day elude their custody.

But now there were no signs of the recurrence of one of those precious intervals, in which so much might be fathomed and brought to light.

There was only a weak, childish enjoyment in the cards, as if for their own sake, accompanied by incoherent mumblings.

Forgetting altogether the peril of her own situation, and even the expenditure of precious time, which might at any moment bring the impatient and suspicious Melinda to the wicket in the door, to the entire betrayal of the fiction by which she had been victimized, Waifa continued her unceasing efforts to arouse the stagnant memory and intelligence of Madame Alceste to something like what was so vitally required of her, but in vain.

Nearly two hours passed in these painfully fruitless attempts, until at last the young girl began to fear that she would presently have to take her departure from the cell but little wiser than when she had entered it, and that little but a tantalization for the future.

But suddenly she bethought herself of a sad little song that she had often sung in the old Nebraska farming days, and to which Madame Alceste had been very fond of listening.

She began to sing the song now, in a low, plaintive key.

Its effect was marked.

The poor woman at once began to listen; the foolish cards dropped, unheeded, from between her transparent fingers; her lips parted, tears rolled down her wasted cheeks, and, while her very soul seemed to drink in the softly-crooned

and familiar words, the wandering light in the poor, strained eyes seemed to grow steadier and more composed.

"My child! my Waifa!" she cried, at last, throwing her arms around the singer's neck as the closing notes died plaintively away; "where am I, and why are you here with me, after all these nightmare years? Speak to me, my darling!"

"Ah, the light breaks in upon you at last!" cried the work-girl detective, joyfully. "It is you that must speak, and revealingly, to me, dear, suffering heart, for I am here to save you, my friend! Only speak fully, answer all my questions, dispel the clouds of mystery that envelop me, and all will yet be well."

Something of the former fear returned to the woman's eyes.

"No, no, no!" she murmured, hurriedly; "you know not what you ask, my child. There is danger, there is death in such knowledge as you seek! No, no, no! What! is it not enough that we are together once again, that my arms enfold you?"

"No, it is not enough," said Waifa, impressively. "Dear friend, look me steadfastly straight in the eyes, and do not withdraw your gaze, while I am addressing you. It will afford you encouragement and firmness. There—that way—just so! Now—but don't take away your gaze, not for a single instant—don't you find yourself growing calmer and less confused?"

"My child, my beautiful child! I could look into your sweet eyes forever."

"That is right, but keep your thoughts from wandering away from what I am about to ask you."

"Yes, my child! Ah! your dear eyes, they are so sweet!"

"Are you other than she who was my nurse, Justine?"

"Justine? Justine is dead! Oh, my child!" with renewed terror, "you must not, must not ask such questions!"

Though it went against her heart, Waifa assumed a commanding and peremptory air.

"Speak, and trifle not!" she said; "are you, then, my mother?"

But the prisoner's terror now became truly pitiable.

"Your mother!" she gasped. "My child, my child! your questions will bring destruction on both our heads."

"Answer my question!" with forced sternness.

"Are you—my—mother?"

"No, no, no! Your mother? Ah, she is dead—dead to you, dead to herself, dead to the world!"

The work-girl detective felt a despairing pang. Her suddenly-reared fabric of hope—the hope that in this suffering creature she might be beholding her mother's image—had been rudely shattered. But there might be yet time to learn much.

"Pay attention!" she exclaimed. "You spoke in your ravings of me as the rightful heiress to some great estate—the Farmington estate."

"Did I? Oh! no, no! that could not, must not have been. My child, my angel! question no further, or you are lost. Do not dare—"

"Woman! answer, and trifle not. Answer, or—or I shall be tempted to curse you!"

"To curse me—you curse me?"

Her anguish was pitiable, but the extremity was critical, and Waifa steeled her heart.

"Yes, unless you answer my queries!"

"Oh, then I will try, I will try!"

"What is my real name? Speak! The initials L. F., on my baby clothes and trinkets, what do they stand for?"

The prisoner steadied herself. She seemed on the point of answering the vital question. But suddenly she uttered a scream.

"See!" she cried, pointing to the wicket, "we are lost. Oh, do not, do not murder my child!"

Waifa turned to the wicket, now for the first time remembering her unbound hair and the absence of her disguising wig.

CHAPTER XXX.

WAIFA ENTRAPPED.

FRAMED in the wicket were the head and shoulders of the duped girl, Melinda, her dark face distorted with fury, her eyes blazing, her revolver leveled.

"Traitor! white devil!" she cried; "so your whole story was but an invention to play upon my heart—to render me faithless to my trust. Die in your falseness!"

Ma'mselle had already sunk fainting on the floor.

Waifa flung back her long, streaming hair, folded her arms over her breast, and calmly faced the certain death that seemed to menace her.

"Fire, if you must," she said. "I deceived you abominably—your resentment is but just—but you know not, you cannot know what more than life I had at stake in deceiving you. I thought the means justified by the end in view, but I see that I was in error. I owe you my life. Fire!"

The grand simplicity of these self-accusing words impressed, with softening, the enraged mulatto.

"You are a woman, then—a spy?" she gasped. "You confess it?"

"Yes."

"You never even saw my Antonio—you confess to having systematically, cruelly deceived me?"

"Yes."

"Traitor, die!"

But at that critical moment the revolver was lowered as if at a gesture of command, and a slight creaking sound in the wall behind her caused Waifa to turn once more.

She confronted Madame Estrella stepping forth from an opening in the double-thickness of the wall, which had, indeed, concealed a narrow flight of steps communicating with the red-and-gold chamber.

If the sudden apparition of the justly-incensed Melinda at the wicket had been astounding, that of the clairvoyante, stepping as it were, out of the solid masonry, was simply appalling.

Her own hair, a magnificent mass, was loosened in rich waves down her back, as though she had been just awakened out of uneasy slumber, perhaps by the promptings of some warning dream, or sleepless second-sight, watchful of its possessor's secrets, on the point of betrayal, in the prison cell.

Her face, ordinarily so beautiful, was simply terrible now—the features being drawn and set, the lips parted so as to show the glistening, clinched teeth, the nostrils quivering, the eyes blazing like those of an enraged serpent—lustrous with a baleful and unholy fire.

Indeed, her whole figure suggested a mingling of the serpent and the tiger.

One jeweled hand clutched the folds of the rich dressing gown over her heaving breast, in the other, half concealed in the drapery of the robe, a poniard gleamed.

She stood thus but for an instant.

Then, with the bound of an infuriated pythoness, she crossed the prostrate form of the still insensible prisoner, and the work-girl detective was like a child or doll in her superhuman grasp.

Then came the enraged, articulated hiss of the serpent-woman, like a sort of challenge preceding the swift tightening of her bone-crunching coil.

"So, you were fated to cheat me once again with the cleverness of your accursed disguises!" she hissed. "Wretch! you have, in penetrating to this interior, overstepped at last the threshold of your doom."

Helpless, but fearless, Waifa returned the demoniac stare with a dauntless gaze.

Her dauntlessness seemed to add fresh fuel to madame's fury, even while it stayed the uplifted dagger.

"What have you discovered here?" she demanded. "How far have you questioned the crazed inmate of this cell?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" was the exasperating response.

The threatening dagger was again uplifted, but again it paused.

Something seemed to assure the clairvoyante that, at least, the vital part of her secret was still inviolate.

"Waifa!" she muttered, in a sort of wonder; "are you not terrified?"

"Not I!" with a contemptuous laugh.

"Are you perfectly insensible to fear, then?"

"Yes."

"My hand is nerved to strike you dead. I am equally brave and remorseless."

"I believe you."

"Why, then, has the menace of death no terrors for you?"

"Because I am inured to it. My life has been menaced from the cradle up. I have grown no less indifferent than desperate."

Contemptuous indifference is not seldom a foil to death's menace.

Though still keeping Waifa in her powerful grasp, the uplifted poniard slowly sunk to the clairvoyante's side.

She motioned Melinda away from the wicket, and then bent over the young girl with a changed but still terrible aspect.

"Hearken!" she said, in a voice strangely shaken by contending emotions. "Know one secret from me. I am closely allied with your arch-enemy—with the remorseless sleuth-hunter of your life!"

"The secret is a cheap one," was the disdainful reply. "I have suspected it from the first."

"Ah! but listen further. I shall forgive your prying into my house, I shall even insure your future immunity from your dread pursuer."

"What! you will do that?"

"Yes—on one condition."

"Name it."

The woman blushed before answering, but her lips were compressed, her voice still firm as the answer came:

"This is the condition: That you make over George Evelyn's love for you to me."

Astonishment sealed Waifa's lips for the instant, and her silence was strangely misconstrued by the other.

"It can be done—you can easily effect it!" madame went on eagerly. "Swear to me that you will try to effect it, and henceforth you are free, with peace, security and happiness in pros-

pect. You can either tell him plainly that you no longer care for him, or permit him to surprise you in some tenderness with another man. Any way, so that the disruption shall be complete—final. Refuse me, and instant death is your portion!"

She had permitted her madness to hurry her along extravagantly, and only now saw, when too late, in the unmitigated contempt and loathing manifested by her youthful rival's face, how hopelessly, uselessly she had compromised her modesty, her very womanliness.

"What! to you?" said Waifa, with a low, derisive laugh. "Make him over to such as you? Oh, even if it were possible to wean his love from me, you ask for yourself an impossibility. At your age, madame, this is too absurd!"

The clairvoyante was now like a veritable fiend.

"Wretch, beware!"

"But how would you have his love—as a lover's or a son's?"

With a hoarse cry, the woman seized her afresh, almost strangling her, and again the dagger flashed aloft.

"Scoffer! nor youth nor beauty shall bestead you more. Your hour is come!"

"I don't believe it," was the cool reply. "You dare not murder me here, in broad daylight, even in this hole. You are prudent, or you are nothing. The police are within signal! George Evelyn will rescue me from your clutch!"

"Fool, you are friendless here, as if in a cemetery vault! George Evelyn cannot know of your extremity. He is helpless in the chains of a cunning drug that will not release its hold of him for hours. You are in my power!"

Nevertheless, the warning in her rival's defiant words had not been thrown away.

Dragging the young girl from the room, she put her dagger out of sight, gave Melinda some directions as to the care and security of the insensible prisoner, and then swept up-stairs into the kitchen, with her victim no more than a doll in her massive grasp.

Job and Liz were still there, trembling with apprehension at their mistress's infuriated aspect, and doubtless with some vague intimation as to what had been going on down below.

Madame hastily thrust her young captive into the adjoining scullery—a small pantry-like compartment, with one narrow, iron-grated window high up in the wall—threw a glance over the interior to assure herself that escape was impossible, and bolted the door on her, putting the key in her pocket.

"Job," said she, sternly, "order a close carriage, with my particular coachman, and have it at the door within ten minutes." Job obediently disappeared. "Liz, attend me to my room. I am going away, perhaps to be gone all day. You and that wretch in yonder—with a venomous gesture toward the scullery—"will accompany me."

She quitted the room, followed by Liz. When she returned, five minutes later, it was in full attire for her contemplated expedition, with a bottle of chloroform in her pocket, and Job was also just returning to announce that the carriage was in readiness.

"Be ready, both of you, to assist me at my command," said madame.

Job and Liz ranged themselves at her side, apparently ready for any emergency.

Madame drew the chloroform from her pocket, saturated a handkerchief with it, and with this in her hand, ready for use upon Waifa, suddenly threw open the scullery door, and precipitated herself into the cramped interior.

She at once recoiled, however, with a baffled cry.

Her prospective victim had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PRESTO, CHANGE.

WITH all her cunning, Madame Estrella, while noting the apparent security of the scullery, before thrusting Waifa therein, had not perceived a certain object lying in one corner of it.

This object was the portmanteau which had already done the work-girl detective such excellent service in facilitating her various lightning-change disguises.

Accordingly, no sooner had madame precipitated herself into the narrow space intent only on rendering her rival insensible before an outcry could be offered, than a slim figure slipped out from behind the door, and joined Job and Liz without being perceived.

Then, just as madame staggered back into the kitchen, after uttering her cry of baffled rage, the slender figure timidly stepped forward, and touched her cloak.

"If you please, ma'm, could ye assist wid a thrifle a poor gur-rl that's just from Casthel Gar-rden, an' hasn't a fri'nd in the wide wur-rld, ma'm?" said a plaintive voice, musical with its rich brogue. "I'd gladly wur-rk for yez, if I had but the chance."

The clairvoyante turned impatiently, her bitter disappointment still causing her eyes to snap viciously.

She beheld before her a piteous-looking colleen, looking up at her appealingly from under

her cheap hat, and every shred of her decent, but old-fashioned, and insufficient attire, apparently bespeaking the newly-arrived emigrant from the "owld sod."

"Who is this creature?" exclaimed madame, disregarding the appeal, and turning angrily to the others. "How did she get into the house?"

"I don't know, ma'm," said Job, scratching his head, while Liz cast down her eyes. "Mebbe I forgot to shut the basement door, an' she helped herself to walk in. What d'ye mean by it?" he cried, addressing the new-comer with pretended rage. "Be you a beggar or a thief, that you came nosin' inter respectable houses without askin' leave?"

The colleen clasped her hands, and bent her head tremblingly, as if overcome by this brutal address.

"Don't be alarmed, my poor girl," said madame, mastering her disappointment, and perhaps scenting some use to be made out of the girl. "Let me question you a bit, and see what you are able, or would be willing, to do for a livelihood."

"Oh, thank you, ma'm!" and the hands were clasped afresh, but this time in an apparent excess of gratitude.

But just as madame was about to question her, she detected an unfortunate gesture on the part of Liz, in a surreptitious effort to communicate with the colleen.

Instantly her suspicions were awakened, and then a single penetrating glance was sufficient to pierce the work-girl detective's new disguise.

Then to seize the counterfeit colleen in her tremendous grasp, and to bring the chloroform into requisition at last, was but the work of an exultant instant.

"Aha! still another disguise, eh?" cried the clairvoyante. "Patience, my dear Waifa! in a few minutes you shall be ready for a long journey in my company."

With the saturated handkerchief forcibly held over her mouth and nostrils, Waifa had still enough presence of mind to abstain from both breathing and struggling; Liz and Job meanwhile looking helplessly on, as if undetermined what course to take.

A moment later, however, she took her assailant by surprise by suddenly making an immense effort.

She flew at her throat, fought tooth and nail, and, still holding her breath, became as it were, an animated, writhing bar of steel in her grasp.

"Ah! would you so?" fairly growled the clairvoyante, all the unloveliness of her unwomanly rage and malice distorting her recomposed majesty afresh. "Girl, vixen! we'll see about that. Job, a rope, quick! Bind the creature's limbs till the chloroform gets in its work. Quick, you rascal! Liz, help him find the clothesline. Would ye be false to me?"

Both Job and Liz were bungling about the room, still undecided whether to assist in the cruel work, or surrender their future usefulness to the amateur detectives by openly defying their terrible mistress, and thus hopelessly lose her confidence.

But in another minute, madame's overwhelming strength and address had remastered the struggling girl.

Waifa's efforts ceased, and, with her lungs almost to bursting, she must inevitably have resumed respiration, to the speedy loss of consciousness, but for an unlooked-for interposition in her favor.

A heavy hand was laid on madame's shoulder. "Hag! foul adventuress!" exclaimed a hoarse, indignant voice; "give over, lest I forget that you are still a woman, though you'd scarce deserve it. Stop, I say!"

Releasing her would-be victim, the woman turned in a species of terror.

George Evelyn, the object of her mad, unreasoning love, the man whom she had believed to be still under the paralyzing effects of the drug, was before her.

Well, indeed, might she deplore the unwomanly, disfiguring rage in which he had surprised her.

Disheveled, haggard and wild-eyed from the last effects of the insidious drug, which he had finally, however, scattered to the winds so opportunely, there was nothing but disgust, loathing and resentment for her upon that suffering face.

Madame blushed with self-shame, her wonderful beauty returning to her with this return to her womanhood's demands, and some feeble words of attempted justification seemed trying to find utterance.

But it was too late.

With a simple, protecting gesture, in which she finally read his inextinguishable hatred and contempt for her, he had already drawn the now overwrought and sobbing Waifa to his heart.

It was too much.

Desperately flinging hope and prudence to the winds, the clairvoyante dropped her assumed mask, and gave rein to her rage and mortification afresh.

"Intermeddling spies and fools!" she exclaimed, fairly gnashing her teeth; "you shall pay for this."

"Peace, virago!" said Evelyn, with cold con-

tempt. "Deem yourself fortunate if you are not handed over to the police in less than an hour. Know that there is punishment for mountebanks and poisoners!"

He whispered in Waifa's ear. A moment later, she had repossessed herself of her portmanteau and its contents, and, having summarily availed themselves of the carriage at the door, they had left the accursed house behind, and were on their way down-town.

Madame had rushed to one of the windows, and frantically signaled something to the coachman—a sometime creature of her own—but the signal had either been disregarded or misunderstood.

"What is our next step?" asked Waifa, after she had hurriedly recounted her individual experiences.

"First," was Evelyn's reply, "to see you to your home, for the rest that you so much need, and for the final relinquishment of all disguise on your part."

"You are right. I shall never disguise myself again."

"How glad I am to hear you say that!" and he kissed her fervently.

"Yes; but what after that?"

"I must return to my own, also for the purpose of repairs."

"And what then?"

"Then," said he, after a long pause, "I shall take measures for the instant arrest of Madame Estrella, and the rescue of the unfortunate prisoner in her charge. I am fully determined on this course. The police authorities must take charge of the affair."

"How glad I am to hear you say that! But you must wait for me, my darling! You must do nothing, save in my company."

"I would sooner have you taking the rest and nourishment you so much need."

"But no more than you do. No; I, too, am determined on this course. You shall effect the arrest and rescue in my company, or not at all."

"So be it, then." And he once more tenderly embraced her, as the coach came to a pause before her door.

About two hours later, after restoring their energies with food and giving the necessary attention to their attire, Waifa and Evelyn were once more on their way to the clairvoyante's house.

A stalwart police detective from Headquarters accompanied them, with a warrant for Madame Estrella's ignominious arrest and custody of one Madame Alceste, an insane woman, unlawfully deprived of her liberty by the aforesaid, which had been duly sworn out by Evelyn before a justice of the peace.

"We may have trouble," said Waifa, in a low voice, as they were descending from the Elevated station at 125th street and Third avenue. "You do not forget the woman's superhuman strength, in case she should take it into her head to resist?"

"I forget nothing," was Evelyn's reply. "Such an emergency has been provided against."

In fact, even as he spoke, the trio were joined by two gigantic policemen in uniform, whose services had been telegraphed for from Headquarters.

"It may look a little cowardly," thought both Evelyn and Waifa, as 127th street was entered, "this marshaling of so formidable a force for the arrest of a single-handed woman, and a professional clairvoyante, at that. But it won't do to forget that our prospective prisoner is a most phenomenal personage."

However, a little disappointment was in store for them.

Not only had the queen bird of their quest disappeared, but an entirely empty cage was all that had been left.

Notwithstanding the brief time that had been accorded her, Madame Estrella had taken the alarm, and vanished, with her entire household, as incontinently as if she had melted away into the air.

A search of the premises, whose keys had been left with a neighbor, merely revealed the fact that it had been hastily deserted, leaving the expensive furniture undisturbed.

According to several of the neighbors, two coaches had assisted in the removal of the inmates, five in number, including an elderly invalid lady, and a number of trunks and boxes, but no more definite information as to the hurried decampment could be obtained.

"I say, my friends," said the police detective, "it looks like we're dished completely."

His fellow officers grinned.

"Very like it," said Evelyn, calmly.

"Had the clairvoyante chiseled you?" continued the detective. "Was it a case of swindle, or downright robbery?"

"Neither."

"Oho! But look here, two coaches can't be swallowed up even in New York after only such a short start of us. Shall I track 'em up?"

"No, thank you," was the reply, after a glance exchanged with Waifa. "Return me that warrant, if you please. If anything fresh turns up, you will hear of it at Headquarters."

The warrant was returned, though reluctantly

enough, and the two friends were presently left to themselves.

But both were now completely worn out, so they separated, with the understanding to meet again at Evelyn's house on the following day.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONSULTATION.

It is hardly necessary to say that, when Waifa, in her own proper and charming personality, called at the old Evelyn Mansion, to inquire for George on the following day, she met with a much more gracious reception from good Mrs. Watrous than upon former occasions.

"Mr. George," exclaimed the old dame, in announcing the arrival, "the saddest and loveliest young lady in the whole world is here to see you, and I have just shown her into the best parlor."

George, who had just concluded a long interview with Mr. Grubman, with regard to rebuilding the burnt-out manufacturing establishment in the shortest possible order, looked up with a smile.

"It is Miss Target, who will take lunch with us," said he. "You will remember me speaking of her as my forewoman. Come into the parlor, and I will introduce you. It is as well that you should make a good impression on the spot."

"Me make a good impression?"

"Certainly."

"But what for, Mr. George?"

"Miss Target will like enough be your mistress some day, Mrs. Watrous; as I trust you will continue to remain after Miss Target shall have become Mrs. Evelyn."

"Mr. George, thee don't mean it?"

Her arms had dropped at her sides, and she was looking at him in bewilderment.

"Of course, I do."

"When is it to be?"

"Oh, that is not yet decided—the sooner the better, for my part."

"Mr. George, thee takes my breath away."

"Pray recover it, dame."

"That thee, the last of the good and rich old Evelyns—that thee should marry a work-girl!"

"Dame, be careful."

There was an inflection in his voice that she knew too well.

Resignedly she followed him into the parlor, where the introduction took place, and but few more words and natural graces upon the younger woman's part were necessary to win the housekeeper's unreserved admiration, for all that only a work-girl exercised them.

After luncheon, Evelyn and Waifa engaged in brief consultation upon the changed aspect of affairs.

It was finally agreed that nothing more could be done or attempted until word should be received from either Job or Liz, of whose fidelity no doubt could be entertained.

"Where do you think the clairvoyante fled to?" asked Waifa.

"To the Hermitage, wherever that may be," said Evelyn, promptly. "I haven't a doubt now of her holding the closest relations with our arch-foe—the Deep One, as we shall hereafter call him."

"She as much as confessed that."

"Do you think that, in the event of our not hearing from either Job or Liz, we could find the Hermitage?"

"Perhaps so, though the man's description of it was sufficiently vague."

"Yes—a secluded country house in the wildest part of Westchester county, in a locality known as Whippoorwill, about ten miles equally distant from Tarrytown, Sing Sing and White Plains. Still, such a place ought to be found."

"We would have to make the search for it either secretly, or in overwhelming force."

"True; and you feel certain that, with Madame Alceste once wholly in our power and influence, the necessary revelations would be forthcoming, by which the identity of the Deep One would be finally fixed, and even your restoration to your true name, and perhaps a great fortune, might be effected?"

"I have told you everything that I gathered from Madame Alceste's ravings and semi-admissions. Don't you think me justified in hoping for as much as you outline?"

"Yes; we are on the brink of our final triumph, if we can only have free access to Madame Alceste."

"Might Madame Estrella—murder her in the mean time?"

Evelyn started.

"Still," continued Waifa, "I do not think that very probable."

"I am glad you are so hopeful. What makes you think so?"

"The poor woman did not seem to be suffering from ill-treatment at madame's orders. She has more to fear, I think, from Melinda's private malice, in revenge for the cruel deception I practiced to obtain my interview."

"That was an unfortunate necessity. Such are the fruits of those disguises of yours that I have always been so much opposed to."

"And which are now at an end, come what may. Still, you recognize that the deception, despite its seeming heartlessness, was a necessity?"

Evelyn gravely preceded his answer with a gentle kiss.

"It would seem so, dearest," said he, gazing into her beautiful eyes. "But, ah, that you should have had to practice it!"

Waifa betrayed an agitation that she mastered with difficulty.

"I shall regret it to my dying day," said she, simply. "If I can ever make amends for it to the poor girl, it shall be done, at whatever cost to me."

"And I will assist in the reparation. But think no more of it now. The stabbing affair of her lover's, I learn, will prove unimportant, after all. The woman injured, I am told, will declare it as the work of her own hand; so that Melinda may have her beloved Antonio once more at her feet ere long. May the reconciliation be to her advantage, though the contrary is to be feared."

Waifa heaved a sigh.

"Ah, if I could have had but five minutes more with Madame Alceste!" she murmured. "She was on the very point of revealing my true name and origin at the moment of the interruption. That would have, doubtless, been the key to everything."

"Patience! all will come right at last. For the present, I would be content with something less than that."

"Tell me what."

"With a scrap of the clairvoyante's real handwriting, for instance."

"Ha!"

"Yes—but her ordinary handwriting, I mean; not the disguising penmanship of her left hand." Here there was a ring at the street door, and a servant entered with a letter.

Together the friends examined the address, which was both misspelled and vilely written.

"From Liz or Job, I should say," conjectured Waifa, with much eagerness; and, the servant having been dismissed, the envelope was forthwith broken.

Here follows a reproduction of its contents, which were somewhat unique in their way:

"THE HERMITAGE, Wednesday Nite.

"DEER FRIENDS:—Kin you stil trust in me and Liz? If so, pleze wauk out the nite after you reseeve this in the waist lots back of the Thurd Avernoo Ellervated at say 10 oklok, and never mind what happens. All will be fur the best. Ime fly all the time. Dont fale. Yourn til deth,

"JOB MIXER."

"Shall we trust him?" asked Waifa.

"Yes. Spite of the fellow's infamous past services in the Deep One's employ, I believe the only thing left is to trust him unreservedly."

"So do I. We shall then follow his directions?"

"The locality named is a dreary one after dark," said Evelyn, thoughtfully.

"Where is it?"

"Not far from here, in the vicinity of Lexington avenue and Ninety-ninth street. The avenue is only partly cut through there, and squatters' shanties abound—a wilderness of new buildings, half-finished, empty lots and unsavory rock-reared eyries—a paradise for goats, geese and shanty-dwellers. But, no matter, we will go."

At the hour indicated in Job's letter, they found themselves wandering aimlessly about the uninviting locality he had indicated.

The night was fortunately a bright one, but the spot was almost completely deserted, and not without some hints of danger.

"I wish the fellow would show himself, if he intends to," said Evelyn, with no little impatience, after some minutes had elapsed without any result. "If a policeman should chance along here, he might take it in his head to arrest us as suspicious characters."

"But," said Waifa, "did Job make any promise of showing himself?"

"What did he promise, then?"

"Merely that something might happen, which we were not to mind. He didn't even promise that definitely, either, but rather mysteriously hinted that—"

She was cut short by the something happening at that very moment.

Several rough men surrounded the lovers so suddenly as to seem to spring out of the very ground, and at the same instant a close carriage, which had been silently waiting in the shadow of an unfinished building near at hand, was whirled up to the spot.

Before the thing could be realized, Evelyn's arms were pinioned to his sides, while Waifa, caught up from the ground like a feather, was being hurried into the coach by a graceful and powerful masked figure that had just sprung out of it.

Then Evelyn, wholly forgetful of the injunction "not to mind," or disregarding it, was contending against his numerous assailants with the courage and strength of a tiger in the toils.

He was overpowered and thrown on his back in an instant, however.

"Blast it all, stop kickin'!" exclaimed a hoarse whisper, which he recognized as Job Mixer's. "Can't you trust in me? I'm in this thing; no harm shall come to the gal, and you'll hear from her through Liz or me. Blast it! this here plot is mine."

The speaker, whose lips had been close to Evelyn's ear, here sprung to his feet and clambered alongside the driver of the coach, which was then driven away northward at a tremendous pace.

At the same moment Evelyn found himself released, his assailants vanishing as mysteriously as they had appeared.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNMASKED AT LAST.

WAIFA only recovered from her surprise to find herself being driven rapidly away, with her abductor by her side.

After a single collected glance at him, she had no desire to make an outcry, though no attempt was made to prevent her doing so.

For the first time in her hunted, haunted life, she was in close companionship with her relentless, mysterious, murderous arch-enemy.

The assassin of the faithful Wormser, the destroyer of Wormser's wife, the remorseless slayer of others who had dared to interpose between him and his fell pursuit of her, the murderer of Eliphalet Evelyn, the heretofore monstrous Invisibility whose sole pursuing footprints had been splashes of blood, this breathing incarnation of mystery and crime, was here at last substantiated at her very side.

For a moment, she could scarcely breathe; then, in spite of the horror of the situation, a sort of stupefied wonder was her ruling sensation.

Silent, motionless, her dread companion sat like a statue.

The hoof-beats suddenly rung out with a hollow sound, and, glancing out, she saw that they were crossing Harlem River.

"Speak!" she exclaimed. "Where are you taking me to?"

No answer.

"Answer me!" she cried, desperately; "or I shall scream out—my shrieks shall summon help to my aid!"

Still no answer, though a slight airy movement seemed to say as plainly as words, "you will not scream, you will not shriek, you will accept the inevitable."

"Speak to me, I say!" she continued, all the more terrified in that she felt the truth of the words thus subtly implied. "Whom and what are you?"

No answer, not even a movement or a gesture. The mystification was becoming fairly appalling.

By a great effort, she managed to get her hand into her pocket, and grasp her revolver.

"I could kill you!" she gasped. "My skill is perfect, my aim deadly. Put an end to this silence, or I shall kill you!"

Still no answer in words, but a resumption of the airy contemptuousness, as eloquent as before, and to this effect: "Your skill may be perfect, your aim deadly, but you will not lift your hand against me, for I am your doom!"

She felt that it was true, that she was, indeed, helpless, perhaps lost.

She fell back in her seat, and covered her face with her hands, to shut out the glare of those terrible eyes that seemed burning into her very soul, and to hide herself, as it were, from the sense of her own shame and self-contempt.

What! was she, indeed, the Waifa of old, the injured to death's menaces in divers forms, the defier of Fate itself, the dauntless, the hardy, the fearless, the calm? No; with this demoniac spell upon her, she seemed to have been completely transformed.

What would Evelyn think of her bravery and courage, so often approved by him, could he witness her present abject and cowering condition.

Poor Evelyn! She doubted not that he had been murdered. In the light of her being at last in the clutches of the Deep One himself, she could not but think that Job had either turned faithless in the hour of extremest need, or had himself met the fate that had been meted out to his brother Enoch. All must be lost, with not a glimmering of hope remaining, or surely she would not be in her present dreadful position.

Weak, childish tears, such as she had never known before, forced their way through her trembling fingers, and she wept.

To this succeeded a despairing apathy, from which she was suddenly aroused by the coach coming to a halt.

Her fearful companion glided out into the open air, the door closing behind him as if by some strange volition of its own, and she was left alone.

Wonderful change!

Instantly, and as though his very presence had exercised an evil charm that disappeared with it, Waifa felt a sudden renewal of her natural nerve and fearlessness rushing back upon her with a joyous shock.

She was herself again.

She looked out, and realized that many miles had been traversed, for the coach was drawn up before what seemed a deserted wayside inn, buried amid the shadows of lofty surrounding hills, where the jaded horses were being replaced by a fresh team.

She could just make out the outlines of two men, probably the driver and a companion,

moving about in the obscurity while effecting the change.

As to her recent companion, he seemed to have suddenly melted into the night.

Her hand again sought her revolver, her grasp tightening upon its stock as upon the hand of a new-found friend at need.

Cautiously she turned the handle of the coach door, nerving herself to the task of leaping out, pistol in hand, in a swift, bold effort for life and liberty when, to her confusion, the door refused to yield.

It was caught with a dead-latch, whose *sesame* was, of course, beyond her knowledge.

She tried the opposite door, but it was also secured.

The coach was simply a prison-cell or strong-room on wheels.

Still, now that she was rid of that hideously paralyzing presence, her old dauntlessness was once more to the front, and her spirits rose with the very hopelessness of the situation.

She cocked her weapon, and was on the point of sending bullet after bullet through one of the resisting locks, when a man's head momentarily darkened the window opposite to the side by which the Deep One had disappeared.

"Don't give nothin' away, young woman," whispered a hoarse voice. "I'm inter this plot, an' don't you furgit it!"

It was Job's voice. She had had no idea of his proximity up to this moment, and she almost cried out with joy as she recognized it, but a warning gesture silenced her.

"Not a word," he whispered. "I'm on hand, jest remember that."

Then he disappeared.

She was leaning out of the window for a last glimpse of his friendly figure, as it climbed upon the box; and then, just as the coach made a fresh start, what was it that gradually came over her?

The same spell, the same paralyzing fear, the same deadly inertia of heart and brain—it once more possessed her in its sickening, enervating clutch.

She understood it all, as she sunk back, pale, trembling, horrified, in her seat.

The Deep One was once more her companion. He had resumed his place as silently and solemnly as he had vacated it.

There was the hideously powerful and graceful cloaked figure facing her once again, and once more the glowing terrible eyes were burning through her soul.

For the first time sounds issued from those stony lips, but only in the form of a low, blood-curdling laugh, such as could only be conceived of as issuing from the chuckling depths of some truly infernal breast.

Then there was a shadowy motion of one of the gloved hands, the revolver was taken unresistingly from her nerveless grasp, and she was disarmed.

However, in the recurrence of this death-in-life feeling that enchained her once more, Waifa did not seem to particularly regret this.

She accepted everything, even her own despair, as a matter of course; and yet her ruling sense was curiosity—a fascinating, overmastering curiosity to look behind that shrouding veil and behold the face that it concealed.

If satisfied that the gratification of this curiosity would fill her with indescribable horror, she would still have gratified it.

She even felt tempted to tear aside the mask, and her extreme, unnatural lassitude alone prevented her from doing so.

"Speak, monster, or let me see your accursed face, ere I perish of the vague fear and loathing you inspire!" she exclaimed at last.

In response, the mockery was repeated, though only by gesture.

"*Cui Bono*—of what benefit?" it said.

"Because you are so steeped in guilt!" she said, in rejoinder to the expressed but unspoken words. "Monster, even though my own life be the forfeit, I would behold thy face! The names of the murdered Wormser and his wife, the ghosts of Eliphalet Evelyn and all the others over whose unoffending corpses thou hast so ruthlessly stepped in thy blood-hungry pursuit of my life, demand that I should look, if but once, upon the incomparable mystery and hideousness of thy awful face!"

"Not yet, not yet, my child!" was the softly-pantomimed reply. "Wait, possess your eager soul with patience, till it pleases me to Gorgonize thee with the visual feast that thou dost crave so madly."

Waifa sunk back with a little, dreary groan.

As she did so, the Deep One made a swift, waving gesture with a gloved hand, in which what seemed to be a handkerchief was clutched.

A faint, not unpleasant odor seemed to accompany the movement, and the young girl's sense of fear and insecurity was at once augmented, and a sense of physical faintness went with it.

Then for the first time did Waifa comprehend that what she had superstitiously accepted as the exertion of some morally baleful influence, was in reality the production of some overpowering drug or poisonous vapor, subtly disseminated at this strange being's will, for her especial confusion and mystification.

Maddening as was this discovery, it did not assist her to combat the pernicious atmosphere of the hated Presence, and she could only glare back at it in helplessness and fear.

The time passed unconsciously, as in an evil dream.

For the second time, after the consumption of many more miles, a halt was made for fresh horses; but not again did the Deep One desert his post, and once more was the furiously-driven prison-house on wheels whirled through the darkness and loneliness, on and on and on!

At last, however, the headlong speed was somewhat relaxed, and a languid, half-indifferent glance out at either side apprised the captive that they had entered some house-grounds, amid wild and rugged surroundings, and were probably nearing their destination.

So helpless and indifferent had she grown under the strangely-oppressive influence, that she might not have felt any special interest in this, but that her terrible companion, with a repetition of his low, fiendish laugh, now half-arose and leaned toward her.

"Have then thy wish!" he murmured, with a hand upraised to the side of his mask. "Gaze at last, doomed and fated child, upon the lineaments of the human sleuth-tracker that hath hunted thee down from the beginning, and must hunt thee down to the end!"

Nothing more was needed to bring her into a bolt-upright attitude of agonized expectancy.

The veil was stripped aside.

One glance she gave, one cry she uttered, and then fell back insensible.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HERMITAGE.

WHEN Waifa recovered her consciousness, it was to find herself in bed, with a slight, small figure watching at her side.

Recollection quickly returned to her, and, as it did so, she buried her face in her hands, as though to still shut out the hideous and unexpected revelation that had last been imprinted upon her soul before the rush of insensibility to her relief.

But it was only Newspaper Liz, the faithful little Liz, who now, in response to her faint moan, hastened to pull the veiling hands away and humbly kiss the bowed and shrinking face.

"Oh, my dear ma'm, do let up on these, ere hagony, as the Cockney actors get it off at the Old Bowery!" said Liz, with a most commendable effort at cheerfulness and encouragement. "You're all right now. Shall I git you some tea or beer? Every sort of lush to be had for the askin' round these diggin's, so don't be timid in namin' your p'izen."

Waifa was once more her brave self again, as she cast her eyes around the pleasant room, through whose one window the bright sunlight of a new day was beginning to pour with a vivifying cheerfulness, and she patted the little hand that was caressing her.

"Good Liz, dear little Liz! how glad I am to have you with me again!" she murmured.

"Where are we?"

"In a gay old place they call the Hermitage, ma'm."

"Who are they?"

"Merlinder an' the three other servants besides Job an' me."

"How did I get to bed here?"

"You was kerried to it arter you had fainted away dead in the kerriage."

"By whom?"

"By Job an' me, an' then 'twas I that put you to bed, ma'm. That was six hours ago."

"Was—was—" a slight shudder interrupted the words—"Madame Estrella present then?"

"Yes, or soon arter I'd got you snug to rights. Oh, don't take on ag'in over that awful fack, ma'm! Job an' I know it now, as well as you."

Waifa fastened her eyes upon her.

"About the Deep One's identity?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'm."

"How long have you known it?"

"Since coming here, day before yesterday."

Waifa now got up, and began to dress herself, Liz gladly assisting at her dear young mistress's toilette, while the latter's questionings went on.

"What are madame's orders with regard to me?" she asked.

"That you kin come an' go wherever you please, inside the old crib here, ma'm," was the cheery reply, "but not out of doors."

"Ah! and who are my fellow inmates, besides the servants?"

"Your feller inmates? Oh, yes! Well, ma'm, about the same as at the Harlem crib. There's three big-bugs besides your pretty self. Madame has the boss apartment, of course. Then ma'm-selle has the nice room next to this, with Merlinder to wait on her; while Mr. Clape roosts somewheres in the peak of the roof when he ain't a-fishin' in the lake."

"So, Mr. Clape is here, then?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"And I'm to have the freedom of the house?"

"Even to the extent of visitin' ma'm-selle at my pleasure?"

"Yes, ma'm. In fack, that's specefied in the orders."

Waifa was no less astonished than rejoiced to learn this. She, however, reflected that her general prison must be a secure one for this privilege to be granted so readily, and made no doubt that some cunning, ulterior motive, on the part of her terrible captor, was at the bottom of it all.

"I wish you would get me some breakfast, Liz. I am terribly hungry."

"Right on the jump, ma'm!" and the girl made for the door. "You'll get a good 'un, too, ma'm; for it's boss cookin' we've got at the Hermitage."

"Wait, Liz!" Waifa drew the girl to her, and lowered her voice. "I want you from this moment to set all your wits to obtaining something secretly for me."

"You know I'm yourn to the last kick, ma'm. What is it?"

"Any scrap of paper in madame's handwriting—her real writing, I mean, not when she disguises it by using her left hand."

"I know, and I'll manage it sooner or later."

When I was in her room an hour ago, she was busy enough writing, an' with her right hand, too. Leave me to manage it."

"If I can only get that," thought Waifa, after Liz had disappeared, "and send it to Evelyn, it will convey to him the terrible truth with regard to her far better than I could tell it in any other way than by word of mouth."

For the first time, she walked to the window, and took a survey of her new environments.

The house seemed an old but substantial one, and it was surrounded by neglected grounds, with barns and other out-buildings not far away and with indications of the place having been kept up at some time or other with a certain degree of elegance and pretension. But all was now dilapidated, and nothing could well have exceeded the savage wildness of the adjacent scenery.

Waifa, who was not familiar with the environs of New York, was not a little surprised at so much natural ruggedness and savagery within so short a distance as thirty miles of the heart of the great metropolis, as she rightly conjectured the retreat to be.

Liz soon returned with a most excellent breakfast, and while Waifa was disposing of it with a hearty appetite, the girl busied herself with setting the room to rights.

"I never enjoyed a breakfast more than this," said Waifa, when she had finished. "That fish was the most delicious I ever tasted."

"Them pickerel is bully, an' no mistake, ma'm," graciously assented the little handmaid.

"I suppose they were taken from the lake?"

"Yes, ma'm. Mr. Clape hooked 'em for you special this mornin' afore daybreak."

Waifa was glad not to have known this sooner, for she certainly would not have eaten of the fish.

Clape at this moment unceremoniously entered the room and took a chair.

"Leave the room, sir!" exclaimed Waifa, when sufficiently the master of her indignation.

"How dare you come into my presence?"

Clape settled himself a little more cosily, laughed, and honored her with a leer.

"Liz, you devil's imp, quit the room!" said he.

"I want to have a nice little chat with Miss Target—with Mrs. William Clape, as is to be."

As Liz showed no disposition to obey instructions, he incontinently thrust her out of the room, closed the door, and resumed his free-and-easy conversational attitude.

"My dear girl," said he, genially, "times have changed materially in our relative positions, as you will doubtless perceive."

Waifa made no answer.

"Ain't you going to speak?"

"Not without compulsion. A thief's companionship is not desirable."

He colored and scowled.

"You're to marry me inside of forty-eight hours," he growled. "So you might as well be civil, my dear."

She seemed not to have heard him.

He had evidently been drinking, and from being simply coarse and exultant he became brutal and familiar.

"Give me a kiss!" he cried at last, making a dash to seize her. "Come, my beauty, you might as well get used to me first as last."

Waifa calmly evaded him, and possessing herself of a small carving-knife from among the breakfast dishes, gently but significantly toyed with it, much as if it were a paper-cutter, while motioning him back.

"I am very strong, active and courageous, sir," said she, quietly. "But as I object to the taking of human life in the abstract, even in self-defense, you are in no particular danger unless you should be so unfortunate as to goad me to madness."

He only glared at her.

"I will condescend to edify you a little," she continued; "Do you recollect a certain Dick Gaines whose acquaintance you recently formed?"

"What of him?"

"That individual was myself."

"What! you don't mean it?"

She nodded.

"One of your disguises, eh?"

"Yes."

"I can hardly believe it. But why do you tell me this?"

"Merely to prove to you that your present revelation of your true character is no news to me. Its cheap hypocrisy and baseness was already unvailed to me, as you must know."

He growled out an oath.

"That's neither here nor there," he cried. "You are now in my power, as you know."

"I know nothing of the sort. Unspeakable cur! Stand off!"—he was crouching, as though for a spring—"or the consequence be on your own head?"

He hesitated, but not noticeably through fear, and there was an ugly look in his flushed face and bloodshot eyes.

But at this instant the door opened, and Madame Estrella entered.

She took in the situation at a glance, and a swift frown gathered upon her face, which was very pale.

"Drunken brute! disappear!" She ejaculated, pointing to the door.

As Clape only looked bellicose, without offering to obey, she seized him by an ear, fairly lifted him over the threshold, and shut the door in his face.

Waifa retained her nerve only by an effort. Even in this action of madame's, which in any one else would have partaken of the ridiculous, there had been a certain terribleness and dignity, as of one who calmly dared everything and feared nothing.

Waifa confronted that terrible face without quailing, though still with visible discomposure.

Madame was regarding her with an inscrutable look.

"It is no wonder that you are terrified," said she, slowly. "The sudden knowledge of my identity with the Deep One, with your implacable and murderous life-long pursuer, may well have brought a shock to your young heart, though steeled, as it has been, by its uninterrupted combat with danger and adversity."

Waifa mastered an involuntary shudder, but did not reply.

In spite of all, curiosity was still her controlling emotion—curiosity as to the motive of this strange being's exceptional career of heartlessness and crime.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DAYBREAK.

THE clairvoyante seemed to read the work-girl detective's inmost thoughts.

"Your curiosity is but natural," said she, "and, with regard to myself, is about to be immeasurably increased before I shall deign to gratify it, if, indeed, your own intuition should not forestall me in solving the mystery."

Waifa saw and heard as in a dream.

"You perhaps chiefly wonder," continued madame, "why I, who have so long inexorably sought your life, should have yet spared you at this critical hour, when you are wholly in my power. It is from magnanimity, and yet not wholly so. Love—a fleeting blush swept over the marble pallor of her face—"has revolutionized the evil in my nature. But the moment has come for you to wonder still more. Behold!"

She threw open a door communicating with a larger adjoining room, whence the whilom half-crazy ma'mselle—the Madame Alceste of our narrative—now evidently in her right mind, though physically much reduced, was feebly advancing to meet the young woman, with a world of love and tenderness in her soft eyes.

"Fly to her heart," continued madame, with the same impressive calmness. "She is your mother."

Waifa gave a half-inarticulate cry. Her own mother! But had not those very lips declared to her that her mother was dead? No; now she recollected that it was only "dead to the world, dead to hope," that had been said. The next instant mother and daughter were locked in each other's arms.

After permitting their transports to last but a short time, the clairvoyante again commanded the attention of both.

"Look you, Louise Farmington—for that is your true baptismal name," said she, fixing her solemn gaze upon Waifa, "and learn the simplicity of the dreadful mystery that has environed you. I am Delia Star, and your mother yonder, Theresa Farmington, is my younger half-sister. My mother, a beautiful Hungarian fortune-teller, married your grandfather, John Otis Farmington, a wealthy Bostonian, as her third husband, when I was five years old, and died a year later in giving birth to your mother. There had also become a member of the new household a sickly little half-brother of mine, my mother's child by her first marriage, as I had been by her second. This half-brother still survives in the person of William Clape. Mr. Farmington could not abide this child, whose disposition was the reverse of agreeable, though, after our mother's death, he was grudgingly vouchsafed a home with us. Though I was not his own, my step-father seemed to love me equally well with his little Theresa. Indeed, as we grew up together, in the midst of every luxury that heart could desire, I developed such exceptional beauty of person, that I led myself to believe that I had the preference

in his affections, and would at least share equally in his vast wealth in case of his death. I was woefully deceived. I was twenty-four, and Theresa eighteen when John Otis Farmington died suddenly of apoplexy. By his last will and testament the entire estate, a princely one, was left to Theresa, subject to a meager income secured to me, with the care of my half-brother, William Clape, then twenty-seven, who was to receive nothing. But, in the event of Theresa dying without a natural heir, I was to succeed her in the estate. Incensed and maddened as I was over the reading of the will, I still nourished hope. Theresa was mentally and physically my inferior. She was weak, timid and vacillating. I was determined, daring, unprincipled, and had already secretly developed, under the mask of my beauty, not only a most phenomenal muscular vigor, but also my strange gifts of second sight and ventriloquism, whose chance discovery had startled me not a little. There was, therefore, every likelihood of my surviving my half-sister, and, as I held her already the slave to my powerful will, I deemed it an easy matter to prevent her ever marrying, and thus insure myself as her successor in the estate. Judge then of my confusion and exasperation upon being privately informed by Theresa that she was already a widow and a mother. Dreading her father's resentment, she had, when but sixteen, secretly married her second cousin, one Hancock Farmington, a handsome young artist and penniless ne'er-do-weel, whom her father had cordially detested. A year later, and Theresa had become both a widow and a mother—your mother, Miss Farmington—without her secret being divulged; and now the death of old Mr. Farmington had left Theresa and her baby in possession of the finest fortune in Massachusetts."

The clairvoyante came to a pause, as if to control some rising agitation, and then proceeded:

"I will not dwell upon the effect of this intelligence—the death-blow to my hopes—upon my nature. It simply demonized me. In less than a year later Theresa had abandoned her child to the mercy of strangers, as being the only means of preventing its murder at my hands, and had herself fled into the unknown, after leaving me a power of attorney for such disposition of her wealth as I should see fit to make—another self-sacrifice to the Cerberus of my hate, for she knew me well. Before this I had almost accomplished the child's death by the corruption of its nurse, Justine Alceste, who had promised to poison the child at my instance, when the interposition of the mother at the final moment came to the rescue. I pensioned off Justine to keep her quiet, and she died two years later. I had now at least the custody of that vast wealth that I had so craved, but as long as the infant heir lived I could not be at peace. Louise Farmington, from that hour I have untiringly sought your life. Innocent lives have been ruthlessly sacrificed by me to gain that end, but I care not now. The ghosts of Wormser and his wife, of Eliphalet Evelyn and the rest, may rise up against me, but I am undaunted. I only succeeded in tracking Theresa down when I found her living with you and Wormser in the vicinity of Omaha. The circumstances of my carrying her away with me you are now aware of. She had assumed the personality of the faithless nurse, Justine Alceste, whose compromising correspondence with me had somehow come into her possession. Since then she has been my secret prisoner, for the most part in a state of imbecility or aberration. The shock of your last meeting with her seems to have restored her reason."

"So, I give you back to each other. Here, in this casket"—she laid her hand upon a strong box that formed part of the furniture of the room in which they were sitting—"are all the necessary papers for the complete establishment of your claims on presenting them to the executors of the estate in Boston. I have made way with comparatively little of the incomes; I reserve nothing for myself."

She paused, folding her arms, and scrutinizing the pallid faces of her amazed hearers with a searching gaze.

"I resign everything," she continued, "everything—my revenge, my malice, my hatred, my dreams of unquestioned wealth—all! I do so but upon one condition. Miss Farmington—Waifa—it is to you that I now solely address myself. The single condition I demand is in your power alone to grant. It is the surrender of your heart's idol, George Evelyn's love, to me!"

Waifa might have been prepared for this absurd demand, in view of a previous experience; nevertheless, it came upon her wholly unexpectedly.

"This is madness!" she replied, after making sure of her self-control. "You must be beside yourself to suppose that such a transfer of my lover's heart, even if possible on my part, could be of benefit to you!"

"Why?"

"Heavens, woman! Can you ask? Could an honorable man, knowing your past as George Evelyn must sooner or later know it, be induced, by any possible or impossible glamour of the senses, or fascination of the reason, to bestow his regard upon such a self-confessed, diabolical and blood-stained wretch as you?"

The clairvoyante bit her lip, while the ominous glitter in her eyes grew yet more unmistakable.

"I'll take care of that," said she, quietly. "All I ask is for him to be disenchanted of you—for a fair field in which to win him to myself in my own good time. Shall I have it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you give him up?"

"Never!"

A terrible look—the look of a maniacal fiend—rushed into madame's face, but she chased it away with a great effort.

"Consider well my demand," said she, huskily. "Do not decide rashly."

"No need of considering at all," returned Waifa, doubting no longer the terrible creature's insanity. "You simply rave!"

"Do I so?" suddenly burst forth madame with frightful vehemence. "Know, then, that I am still the arbitress of your fate and your mother's—that I can undo swifter than I can do! Tempt not my desperation. Ye are still in my power!"

Waifa's mother was trembling like a leaf, but Waifa protectingly drew the poor wasted form closer to her breast.

"Frightful woman! you can do your worst, and I doubt not that you will," said she, calmly. "But, come what may, you shall still find me true to humanity and true to myself in defying you to the last."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SUNRISE.

At this instant another ominous figure, theretofore concealed in crouching attitude behind the great chair in which madame was majestically posed, rose into view.

It was that of the young woman Melinda, her eyes resting exultantly on the mother and daughter, her dark face distorted with fierce hate.

"You, Melinda, have a right to your resentment," said Waifa, with noble self-reproachfulness. "Nothing can justify my deception of you, at the expense of your emotional nature—no, not even the crying, the pressing need of my end in view—the rescue of my poor, long-suffering mother here! I freely confess my culpability in that, and, if the opportunity is ever vouchsafed me, I shall earnestly strive to merit your forgiveness through every reparation in my power."

But the magnanimity of these noble words was lost upon the passionate, untutored nature of the mulatto, who was seen, with the features still expressive of inordinate malice, to whisper something in her mistress's ear.

The latter seemed to give heed to a suggestion of peculiar fiendishness, notwithstanding that she impatiently waved her prompter back.

"Ye are wholly in my power," she repeated, her voice vibrating with suppressed passion. "I am secure here, none can ever pierce to this my savage fastness among the wild hills. My servants are the unquestioning creatures of my merest whim. The lake out yonder is both lonely and deep. I can with a breath unsay all that I have said, and simplify the revengeful purpose of my long career of crime, by consigning ye both to the bottom of that lake, whose deep and sullen waters will keep my secret well. Speak, and for the last time; is my condition accepted or refused?"

Theresa Farmington made a quivering motion, like that of a frightened bird, but a pressure of Waifa's protecting arms was sufficient to reassure her.

"I defy you!" said Waifa, contemptuously.

"Do your worst, you she fiend!"

With a hoarse, hissing sound—the battle-sign of an infuriated pythoness—madame was upon her feet.

Then Waifa was as a straw in her tremendous grasp, while the frail mother was snatched into the air by the robust Melinda, whose rage was only secondary to that of her savage mistress.

"To the lake with them—to the eternal river of the dead!" raved the clairvoyante, making for the door with her burden. "Clemency is past, and the feast of vengeance is at hand!"

But, before she could reach the door, it flew open, and Newspaper Liz dashed into the room.

"Come on!" she yelled, as if to some one following; "here they are!" And she at once sprung, like a little terrier, to Waifa's rescue, her sharp teeth closing on one of the clairvoyante's hands with the snapping virulence of a steel trap.

Madame gave a snarl, and instantly the brave child was caught up by the wounded hand, as in a vise, and thrashed up and down and around and about with a violence that threatened to break every bone in her skin.

But there was a shout, and Job Mixer rushed upon the scene, heading a somewhat more orderly rush on the part of George Evelyn and three stalwart police detectives.

There was a frightful struggle, but a brief one. "Didn't I tell yer, young woman, that I was on hand? Couldn't yer have trusted me?"

The words were Job's, and they were addressed to Waifa, now nestled, panting and half-fearful in her lover's arms.

Waifa's new-found mother was reclining on a

lounge, unhurt, but piteously agitated. Melinda was on the floor, bound hand and foot, but glaring and gnashing her teeth. The room was in the direst confusion. From outside and overhead there came the sound of crashing blows upon woodwork, mingled with the angry shouts of men and what seemed the half-muffled snarls of a mad-dog at bay.

"Good Job!" faltered Waifa, in response; "you have in to-day's work redeemed your past, howsoever bad it may have been. How did you manage it?"

"Easy enough, ma'm. Mr. Evelyn no sooner got on his feet last night, arter you was kerried off in the coach than he found a piece of writin' pinned to his coat. It gave him the hull thing away, an' told him how to foller you up, jest as he has did, in the nick of time."

"Yes," said Evelyn, gratefully, "I followed Job's instructions to the letter, and the timeliness of my arrival has proved their excellence."

Here the sounds of outside contention ceased, and one of the detectives came running back.

"The woman is a fiend incarnate!" he exclaimed. "She's escaped to the top floor, and barricaded the only staircase leading up to it."

Frightful screams—evidently in a man's voice, though womanish in their intensity—were now heard issuing from directly overhead.

"Clape's voice!" exclaimed Waifa, starting up. "If he is up there at that maniac's mercy, he will doubtless be killed!"

Here the other detectives came back, coughing as if half-stifled, and bringing with them the smell of smoke and flame.

"She's fired the loft!" gasped one. "The woman has become a regular hell-cat! If you've got anything valuable hereabouts, you'd better make haste in saving it."

The work-girl pointed to the iron-bound strong box, and Evelyn, already with some information as to the value of its contents, seized it in his arms, while Waifa took charge of her mother, and Melinda was summarily caught up by the burlier of the officials, who grinned amusedly at the girl's impotent attempt to bite and scratch him for his pains.

"Wait!" said Waifa, determinedly; "Clape must not be left to the fury of that mad woman. Bad as he is, it must not be thought of."

"If you mean the poor chap what's up there with her, ma'm," said one of the detectives, "he's past prayin' for, to my thinking. He's stopped yellin', anyway."

"Yes," said he who had last quitted the barricade. "An' just after his last outcry there was a sort of crunch, as if a tiger's paw had dropped onto a lamb's neck. He's done for, sure!"

"Come," called out Evelyn, authoritatively. "Out of this, with everything of value that can be saved! See; the fire is all but surrounding us. Once in the open air, we must contrive a plan to reach the maniac and her victim from the outside."

But, though his instructions were at once acted upon, this was found to be impossible.

A few moments later, when they were all gathered upon a lawn between the house-front and the lake, amid such valuables and pieces of furniture as had been hastily snatched from the rush and whirl of the devouring element, the piazzas and the two lower stories were almost completely wrapped in flames, while the roof and garret gables were just catching.

It was a very old house of shingled sides, and, in the fierce wind that chanced to be prevailing, it burned like tinder.

"I don't quite understand," said Evelyn, voicing more thoughts than his own. "The fire has its chief headway from somewhere below, notwithstanding that our first intimation of it was from the barricaded stairway."

"That's owing to a sort of magazine in the cellar, sir," explained a gaunt woman, who was one of the three house servants. "Madame always kept it primed with combustibles, and a fuse led from it to somewhere up in the garret, though exactly where or how none of us could ever discover."

"Indeed!" his eyes were bent piercingly upon the speaker. "And how long were you in madame's service?"

"Off and on, three years, sir."

"Where are your fellow-servants? Ah, here they are. Officers, take these three persons in charge. Their testimony may be of value in bringing out the details of their terrible mistress's crimes."

This was accordingly done, but it was subsequently proved that the servants were innocent persons from the neighborhood, who had had no knowledge of the arch-criminal's dual character nor of her bloody and mysterious deeds.

At this moment there was an awful shout, and all eyes were directed to a gable window, surrounded by eddying flames and smoke-wreaths, at which the maniac had suddenly appeared with Clape in her clutch, still alive and struggling.

The pair were wholly beyond succor from below.

Suddenly, with a mocking laugh, the maniac let go her hold upon the man.

To the amazement of the spectators, he fell through the flames, alighting apparently without serious injury on his feet; but it was like-

wise at once manifest that he was also bereft of reason, probably from extreme terror.

"Keep her off!" he howled. "She'll carry me down into hell with her! Keep her off! keep her off!"

Still screaming out the words, and before he could be prevented, he sped across the lawn like one pursued, and plunged head-foremost into the deep lake.

The sullen waters closed over his body, and he was never seen again; the placid depths of Wampus Pond, as the spot is called, keeping the secret of William Clape's deserved fate inviolate even to this hour.

For but a moment longer was the maniac clairvoyante seen at the gable window—tossing her arms wildly—magnificently terrible in the fierce glow of the devouring flames.

Then there was a great gust; roof, walls and gables were folded away in their fiery winding-sheet, and a faint, expiring cry, like that of an irredeemably lost one in its final plunge, told of the parting of that terrible soul from her mortal tenement which had been so goodly to look on and yet so deceitfully fair.

Two months later, George Evelyn and Waifa Target, as we shall still call our work-girl heroine, were standing in the drawing-room of a sumptuous Boston residence, the property of the lady, with an ineffable happiness in their faces; for they were newly from the marriage ceremony that had made them man and wife, and this was the first time for days that they had been wholly, absolutely alone with each other.

Alone together, and at such an hour, on the very threshold of Love's palace of immortal joys! Is there in all the universe of things a dual solitude, a linked duality, so ecstatically, so divinely sweet?

"At last! at last!" murmured Evelyn, folding his lovely bride to his bosom, and parting the fleecy folds of her bridal veil to reach the dewy treasure of her lips. "Alone, all, all alone, and with thee!"

"Yes, but only for a moment just now, my darling," she replied, after a blissful pause. "You know we have promised my mother to receive the congratulations of at least three of our humble friends, who were intimately associated with the perils of the past. Ah, they are coming even now."

Here Mrs. Farmington, charmingly dressed, and looking in vastly improved health, entered the room with a smile on her refined face.

She was followed by Job Mixer, Newspaper Liz, and Melinda, all nicely attired, and all full of the smiles that were so befitting to the joyous occasion.

After the trio's honest congratulations had been spoken, both George and Waifa referred to Job's new employment, asking him how he liked it.

"I like the paper-box manufacturing business even better than it likes me," said Job, heartily, "though Mr. Grubman assures me that I'm getting along first-rate. Indeed, sir, and indeed, ma'm, I find honestly working for my living so bracing and good that I wonder I haven't always thought so."

"That will come all right," assured Waifa. "And how do you like box-making, Melinda?"

The comely mulatto averted her face to hide a sudden blush.

"Nicely, ma'm," she replied, modestly, "but I—I don't know that I can stick to it always, ma'm. I—I'm going to be married, ma'm."

"I am glad of it. To Antonio?"

"Yes, ma'm. He got out of jail last week, and he's working awful hard. We're to be married next Friday."

"An unlucky day, according to some foolish notions," cried Waifa, gayly, "but I'll see to your having such a *trousseau*, Melinda, as shall leave all ill-omens to take care of themselves. Now, Liz, for your turn. How do you get along in the new manufactory?"

"Well, ma'm, I can't say as I am to be married, at least not just yet awhile, for one thing," replied Liz, with her merriest grin. "But, for another thing, I do say as how there's only one drawback among the women and girls low profit-sharin' with Evelyn & Co."

"And what may that be, you little rogue?"

"That Miss Target ain't their forewoman any longer, ma'm."

Waifa burst into a happy laugh.

"Well, you'll often see me there again, at least as a visitor," said she. "And who knows but I may play being forewoman again, just for amusement?"

"No, no!" interposed Evelyn, while Waifa's mother tried to look a trifle shocked. "You must remember that hereafter your duties to yourself, to society—"

"But I say yes, yes!" cried the beautiful bride, putting her pretty hand softly over his lips. "Whatever my duties to myself, to society, and even to you, I shall never forget or cease to take pride in the honest and struggling past, where I was ever a worker among workers, and, for a brief space at least, not unknown to adventure, to danger, and to fame, as Waifa, the Work-girl Detective!"

THE END.

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